

## Weaving Intersectional Rhetoric: The Digital Counternarratives of Indigenous Feminist Bloggers

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### Abstract

This essay explores how that intersectional rhetoric comes together through language, visual art, and nuanced argument to inform, entertain, and win allies in the battle to enforce Indigenous rhetorical sovereignty both on and offline. The author selected three of the most well known and high profile popular culture blogs and three main threads to exemplify how Native women are asserting their own identities and ideas and how they are using internet to fight the imposition of oppressive fixed binaries on themselves and on their communities.

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### Keywords

American Natives, feminism, blog, rhetorical  
sovereignty, decolonization

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I like to view everything through an Indigenous feminist  
lens, to keep myself grounded.  
(Samantha Nock, *A Halfbreed's Reasoning*)

The argument has been that centering the identities,  
experiences, and perspectives of those who are  
often marginalized and erased in political projects  
that rely on singular identity-based frameworks will proffer  
a more transformative feminist politics that sacrifices no one.  
(Ann Russo, *The Future of Intersectionality: What's at Stake*)

The stories we tell each other tell us who we are,  
locate us in time and space and history and land, and suggest who gets to speak and how.  
One might therefore say stories are highly rhetorical [...]. They might even help  
suggest a way out of the colonial stories that have blocked vision for so long,  
privileging some rhetorical storytelling traditions and silencing others.  
(Lisa King, Rose Gubele, and Joyce Rain Anderson,  
Introduction to *Survivance, Sovereignty, and Story*)

Indigenous feminist bloggers weave an intersectional, rhetorical story that lances the core of American popular culture and misinformed imaginations. The Native American women bloggers introduced in this essay are unknown to most non-Native Americans, most rhetoric scholars, and most feminists, but should be on our radar because of their

refusal to be constrained by colonialist binaries, single rhetorical forms, or imposed boundedness to the margins. These Indigenous feminists practice in the digital space to reinforce and reclaim rhetorical sovereignty as an outcome for themselves and their communities. Once the weaving is complete, the resultant warmth of rhetorical sovereignty provides some protection from the cold colonial stories of erasure and absence. The purpose of this weaving together of seemingly different methodologies is to create a complex and nonlinear intersectional rhetoric that does not exist in a vacuum, but embraces the mess. Too often, scholars rely on neat categories, trying to impose order on chaos. But life is chaos. Scholarship and practice are much livelier and real when binaries are rejected in favor of complexity.

Accepting complexity also requires the destruction of boundaries. Alongside ideological, socio-political, and cultural categories that are imposed on Native peoples by American governments past and present, educational textbooks, and bald ignorance are assumptions that Native peoples exist almost exclusively as relics of the past, relegated to invisibility as modern American culture runs roughshod over Indigenous lifeways, names, sacred spaces and objects, appropriating them for capitalist profits that never benefit the real, living indigenous communities. After all,

a feminism without borders must envision change and social justice work along these lines of demarcation and division [...]. I want to speak of feminism without silences and exclusions in order to draw attention to the tension between the simultaneous plurality and narrowness of borders and the emancipatory potential of crossing through, with, and over these borders in our everyday lives. (Mohanty 34)

The very idea that Native women are asserting their own identities and ideas on the internet is a radical deconstruction of the boundaries that Western society has imposed on indigenous peoples. Perhaps this is why nothing has been written about indigenous feminists decolonizing the web through blogging; to write about such decolonial reclamation by women who aren't even supposed to exist is an act of rebellion and transgression to the modern American academy.

Indigenous feminist bloggers use the internet to fight the imposition of oppressive fixed binaries on themselves and on their communities; their digital interventions simultaneously preserve tradition and present contemporary realities of real indigenous experiences. This is the same fight that Indigenous women writers and scholars have always been fighting with words and actions; the only difference here is the medium. Scholars, teachers, and feminists have much to learn from these women and their stories and intersectional rhetorical practice. By examining the posts and comments from three blogs written by Indigenous women, *Native Appropriations*, *Urban Native Girl*, and *Beyond Buckskin*, this essay explores how that intersectional rhetoric comes together through language, visual art, and nuanced argument to inform, entertain, and win allies in the battle to enforce Indigenous rhetorical sovereignty both on and offline. I selected these blogs because they are the most well known and high profile of the blogs written by Native women right now. They all focus on some aspect of popular culture, so they fit together well for the purposes of this essay. I especially examine how these bloggers exert authority over their own identities and community stories, re-claim space to express anti-colonial resistance, and challenge the status quo of stereotyped assumptions about Native Americans generally, and Native American women specifically.

## 1. Prepping the Loom: Decolonial Storytelling in Digital Space

In the first paragraph of the introduction to *Survivance, Sovereignty, and Story*, the editors cite Thomas King's *The Truth About Stories*, reminding readers,

The stories we tell each other tell us who we are, locate us in time and space and history and land, and suggest who gets to speak and how. One might say therefore that stories are highly rhetorical [...] They might even suggest a way out of the colonial stories that have blocked vision for so long, privileging some rhetorical storytelling traditions and silencing others. (3-4)

Colonial discourse is one of the controlling factors in America that determines whose story gets told, who gets to speak or write those stories, and how stories get disseminated. Applying the ideas of story and control to American Indian decolonial digital practices and American Indian Rhetorics pedagogy, Angela Haas cites Ridolfo and DeVoss (2009) when she acknowledges that

colonial discourses have rhetorical velocity – or a strategic and rapid recomposing, promotion, and thus reinforcing of messages, across media, spaces, and places – as they continue to pervade mass media today and continue to educate mass audiences about non-Western peoples, including American Indians. (189)

For instance, one dominant site of these colonial discourses is the university classroom. Very few American literature, history, geography, communication, or even political science courses include or mention American Indian scholars, researchers, scientists, political figures, or the writings and practices of the same. Outside the academy, students, faculty, staff, and the farmer in the dell are inundated with constructions «of American Indians in stereotypical, essentialized, and fetishized ways that contribute to a larger, monolithic fiction of who/what is ‘the American Indian’» (Haas 189). The example Haas uses is the commercial branding that «(re)presents ‘the American Indian’ as a headdress-wearing, tribeless, nationless, generic warrior and tireless promotor of all things organic, all natural, and ecofriendly» (189).

Into this thick morass of fantastical stories about who they are according to the dominant colonial discourse, indigenous feminists bloggers must wade to achieve their persuasive objective. It is a daunting task and not for the faint-hearted because «American Indians are rarely represented, in fact, as contemporary peoples with complex identities and technological expertise. Indeed, on most occasions, American Indians are visually and textually linked to a past and erased from the present and future» (Haas 189). Turning toward decolonial theories and methodologies that are «designed to assist scholars, educators, and students in decolonizing Western foundations of dominant thought by investigating and intervening in the histories and rhetorics that sponsor colonial intellectual production and reproduction», Haas emphasizes the importance of action (190).

Thus, putting theory into action, decolonial methodologies [...] ‘serve to (a) redress colonial influences on perceptions of people, literacy, language, culture, and community and the relationships therein and (b) support the coexistence of cultures, languages, literacies, memories, histories, places, and spaces – and encourage respectful and reciprocal dialogue between and across them’ (Haas 2012, 297). (Haas 191)

These ideas set the stage for the «primary goals of a decolonial digital and visual American Indian rhetorics pedagogy», which Haas says is «to decolonize our habits of mind when interfacing with digital and visual representations of Indianness and indigeneity and with all representations of American Indian technological practices» (191). One of the pedagogical outcomes of decolonial digital rhetorics is disruption «in the rhetorical velocity of colonial digital» discourses (Haas 192). The indigenous feminist bloggers examined in the following sections do just that: they disrupt colonial discourse, change their audiences' perceptions of indigenous peoples, and work to decolonize readers/viewers/listeners' «habits of mind» about who indigenous peoples are today.

Representations of Indigenous peoples in popular and mainstream entertainment, educational, sports, and fashion environments are often leathered and feathered imaginative relics of the past, creating a damaging assumption of their extinction and invisibility in today's world. Each of the following Indigenous feminist bloggers dismantle a piece of this constructed fantasy, often in the face of aggressive and abusive criticism from individuals who do not understand the problem with racist and sexist representations of Native peoples. Their work creates a tightly woven decolonial cloth out of existing scholarly threads at the intersections of rhetoric, indigenous feminism, and intersectional story as practice in digital space.

## 2. Examining the Threads and Their Practitioners

### Thread 1: Rhetorical Sovereignty

In February 2014, the School of Media Studies at the New School in New York hosted an Indigenous New Media Symposium featuring a panel of “Native American and First Nations media makers and creative activists to discuss how new media platforms are being used in the indigenous community to educate, organize, entertain, and advocate”. Panelists included Dr. Adrienne Keene, Cherokee author of the *Native Appropriations* blog, and Dr. Jessica Metcalfe (Turtle Mountain Chippewa), who created *Beyond Buckskin*, a blog that «empowers Native American artists and designers, advancing the quality of Native American fashion through education while providing an in depth podium for societal participation» ([beyondbuckskin.com](http://beyondbuckskin.com)). The goal of this symposium was to increase awareness about how «traditional media's long history of Native stereotypes is being confronted by a new tech-savvy young generation that is speaking out strongly about cultural, political and economic issues» ([inms2014.com](http://inms2014.com)). In her introductory statement, New School assistant professor of global studies and anthropology Dr. Jaskiran Dhillon articulated the necessity and importance of challenging dominant discourses with Indigenous counternarratives in cyberspace:

This important work speaks to the ingenuity and passion of a growing and youthful Indigenous population navigating exceedingly complex social, political, and economic realities in their everyday lives [...]. What remains consistent about all of these efforts. . . is the central and generative role of new media. In our current historical moment, new social media in the form of Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, blogs, Soundcloud, and Tumblr [...] has fundamentally altered the way we relate to one another as organizers and activists, how we produce and disseminate knowledge [...]. The forms of creative expression we engage to interrupt stagnation, apathy, and colonial imagery are strategies for documenting and undertaking resistance, how we challenge dominant discourses through the making and circulation of counternarratives, the way we connect across vast and enormous

geographic spaces, and the manner in which people from different backgrounds, life experience, age, and class positions, race, gender, ability, and citizenship status can actively participate in the process of change. (inms2014.com)

Events such as this one provide a public answer to Scott Richard Lyons' title question, «Rhetorical Sovereignty: What Do American Indians Want From Writing?» (CCCC 51:3, 447). Lyons' argues that sovereignty «is an ideal principle» for indigenous people everywhere, «the beacon by which we seek the paths to agency and power and community renewal» (CCCC 449). Dhillon's comments are almost a perfect echo of Lyons' sentiments that in pursuing sovereignty, indigenous peoples «attempt to revive not our past, but our possibilities» (449). Indeed, rhetorical sovereignty is precisely what these youthful, «creative political» practitioners of new media achieve through intersectional rhetoric. Lyons writes, «Rhetorical sovereignty is the inherent right and ability of peoples to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit, to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse» (CCCC 450).

In response to Lyons, Malea Powell identifies and challenges the structurally-embedded problem of the Western Eurocentric focus of rhetoric studies and the American academy. Powell's critique is «a way to make visible the fact that some of us read and listen from a different space, and to suggest that, as a discipline, it is time we all learned to hear that difference» (CCCC 53:3, 398). Fifteen years after Powell's article the problem remains: Rhetoric scholars and even feminist scholars are often quick to dismiss non-white, non-male cultural and story works as non-scholarly, and are also quick to jump to convenient and comfortable binary descriptions of such works that challenge the patriarchal, canonical structure of academic or cultural discourse. The struggle inside the academy to achieve equality for Indigenous voices and works is real and remains a problem.

In the case of Indigenous feminist bloggers, they intervene in the traditional expectations of American culture and the academy by unapologetically accepting their own rights to rhetorical sovereignty. They thrive in the digital medium, deciding the type of content, scope of the arguments, and style of engagement with existing colonialist assumptions about Indigenous identities and contemporary lived realities. This self-representation is important because as Ellen Cushman writes,

A rhetoric of self-representation facilitates cross-cultural understanding between writers and their audiences: on the one hand, it offers writers a way of constructing these gathered narratives of self; while on the other hand, it offers a way for various audiences to hear the cultural logics and rhetoric exigencies informing these constructions. (CCCC 60:2, 327)

These Indigenous women bloggers achieve both self-representation and rhetorical sovereignty by methodically deconstructing the false master narrative about indigenous peoples, especially about Indigenous women, and replacing it with a vibrant counternarrative filled with intellectual debate, sharp criticism, and logical evidence.

### **Practitioner 1: Native appropriations. Adrienne Keene (Cherokee)**

In her presentation on “Native Representations, Pop Culture, and Cultural Resistance in Cyberspace” at the Indigenous New Media Symposium, Adrienne Keene began by showing the audience a series of stereotypical and essentialized commercial images that

she experienced and that inspired her to begin the blog *Native Appropriations*. These images include ‘Navajo’ panties from Urban Outfitters, a Lego ‘Indian’ character, a hipster in a t-shirt with an image of a sacred headdress on a skull, a sexy female ‘Indian’ costume, an image of Johnny Depp in his Tonto makeup from the film *Lone Ranger and Tonto* (2013), the Red Man character from Disney’s animated feature *Peter Pan*, an old Stanford Indians sweatshirt, Chloe Kardashian and Karlie Kloss in headdresses, a two-page visual spread from a book that teaches children «how to play Indian» with paper ‘buckskin’ clothing and teepee assembly instructions, Cherikee Red soda, Firewater whiskey, a cat teepee, Calumet baking soda, and a box of fireworks called ‘Trail of Tears’. Connected to this last photo, Keene then showed a sign from an Alabama high school football game in Fall 2013: «Hey Indians get ready to leave in a Trail of Tears Round 2». She discussed the ubiquity of these images and how they cross over into every realm of pop culture and media. The choices she makes in this presentation are a direct challenge to the patriarchal, paternalistic, Eurocentric assumptions about Native peoples’ existence that her audience might believe. Her goal is to challenge patriarchal, colonialist attitudes and decolonize the audience.

Upon sharing her very first blog post with an image of a neon dreamcatcher from an Urban Outfitters store, Keene stated,

Something kind of clicked and I realized that the reason my classmates thought that Indians didn’t exist and couldn’t understand that I was a Native person and why I cared so deeply about these issues were these were the only type of images they ever saw of Native people. So I started the blog as a place to catalog it all. (inms2014.com)

Keene’s blog has evolved over time from simply disrupting the colonial narrative and she has gained a new perspective, knowledge, and language to articulate why these images are so problematic. The maturity and confidence of her current blog posts resonate with her personal and educational evolution, as well as her commitment to challenging the stereotyped assumptions of her potential audience, including over 40,000 followers and Facebook fans. It is this community that Keene credits for assisting her quest to change the narrative: «This community has become really amazing [...]. When you have all these people who are interested in issues of representation, are caring deeply about the ways that Native people are represented, then when something happens, we can mobilize that support and change happens» (inms2014.com).

On September 9, 2012, Keene published “Paul Frank offends every Native person on the planet with Fashion Night Out ‘Dream Catchin’ Pow wow”, a blog post that interspersed summary and analysis with ten sets of images during the September 2012 Fashion’s Night Out and Victoria’s Secret’s Fall 2012 televised runway show, plus an “Open Letter” to Paul Frank LA’s staff and Red Light PR. In her open letter, Keene addresses the warpaint on monkeys and the use of headdresses, explaining, «Headdresses are considered sacred in Native communities and are reserved for the most respected and revered leaders. To place one on the head of a monkey trivializes the sacred and respected nature of the warbonnet, and paints Native people as sub-human» (*Native Appropriations*). In addition, Keene explains the social and spiritual nature of Native powwows, as well as the problematic connection the companies made with alcohol:

Photos from your event show a sign on the bar reading “Pow wow and have a drink now!” with drinks called “Rain Dance Refresher”, “Dream Catcher”, and “Neon Teepee”. The vast majority of contemporary powwows celebrate sobriety and are very explicit

about the prohibition of alcohol and drugs on powwow grounds. To associate the consumption of alcohol with a powwow is disrespectful, especially given the history of alcoholism in our communities. (Native Appropriations)

Finally, Keene rounds out her criticism with direct language, the invocation of legislation, and a series of pointed questions:

The bottom line is this: your event stereotypes and demeans Native cultures, collapsing hundreds of distinct tribal and cultural groups into one “tribal” mish-mash, thereby erasing our individual identities and contemporary existence. Until 1978 with the passage of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, Native peoples could be arrested for practicing traditional spirituality—many aspects of which you mocked in your party theme. While the theme may have seemed “fun” and “playful” to you, to me as a Native person, it just represents our continued invisibility [...]. We have sophisticated tribal governments and communities, but how will we be able to be seen as modern, successful people if we are continually represented through plastic tomahawks and feathers? (Native Appropriations)

By using second person, she interrogates the individuals who created this event, and by referencing legal policy, Keene demonstrates her knowledge and acumen with argument, thus setting herself apart from any other complainant. Keene’s approach challenges readers’ «habits of mind» and the fact that «American Indians are rarely represented, in fact, as contemporary peoples with complex identities and technological expertise» (Haas 189). Her approach also opens to the door to alliance-building with potential allies who also have the ability to effect change, such as the many teachers and professors who use her blog in their classrooms.

The 39 comments on the Paul Frank post reveals a mixed reaction from readers. Some of the complimentary respondents applaud Keene for a well-written post drawing attention to an important issue. On the flip side, some negative responses seem to either miss the point, disagree with Keene’s assessment of this event as offensive, or are racist. To wit, one Native respondent took issue with Keene’s focus on the fashion industry instead of real hate crimes and white supremacy:

I am native single mother from California. Do i find this offense? No i dont. There are going to be stereotyping throughout the rest of my life and my Native children’s life. Instead of focusing of what the fashion industry is doing. Why not focus on what you fine up standing other than native in reality are doing about the hate crimes that are happening in your own back yards. Shot guns pulled on children and mothers for being Indian. So quit pissing n moaning about fake tomahawks and neon war paints. And get angry at those White Supremeracist Groups who torment my Native ppl on their own land that they had to re-purchase from others. Don’t think your doing any Native person any good by saying booo to the ppl making money. (Native Appropriations)

As Keene seems more interested in opening dialogue and building solidarity across different cultural, social, and economic boundaries, and in building communities to support and encourage change, she allowed another respondent to react to this commenter in order to reinforce her objective of re-claiming cyberspace to express resistance for the benefit of all Indigenous peoples:

Cultural appropriation is this blog’s entire remit. Is it the only way to do activism, or an adequate one all on its own? Of course not! But it’s part of an entire galaxy of activists

each taking their own specialized route toward justice. EVERY route is being taken. Complaining that one specialist instrument of activism isn't another makes no more sense than complaining a big rig isn't a school bus.

So please. If you see something doing active harm, fight it. If it's just not fighting the one fight you find most important, go find something that IS and throw yourself into that project. Complaints of this nature just sap energy from people who are fighting in their own best way. (Native Appropriations)

The next day, September 10, 2012, Keene posted an update that within minutes of her original post going public, the Paul Frank company issued an apology on their Facebook page. Not satisfied that the company meant their apology, Keene and other online venues such as *Beyond Buckskin* and *Indian Country Today* continued pressing Paul Frank for a better answer. And on September 14, 2012, the president of Paul Frank, Elie Dekel, responded to Keene, who then shared the response and her corresponding thoughts in a blog post:

You guys, I don't really even know how to start this post. Think about how many times I've reached out to companies in the history of this blog, how many times I've thrown my opinion to the ether and received nothing, or worse, received dismissive, hurtful replies in return. That's fully what I was expecting when I posted about the Paul Frank "Dream Catchin' Powwow" on Sunday, especially after the company posted the quick, standard apology on their Facebook page.

So I was surprised, and admittedly skeptical, when I got this email on Wednesday from Elie Dekel, the President of Paul Frank Industries:

Dear Adrienne K,

My name is Elie Dekel and I am President of Paul Frank Industries LLC. I am writing to see if you would be willing to speak with me regarding the recent Paul Frank event. While we have not yet received your letter [*AK note: I only had emailed it to the PR company*], we have seen the copy online and would like to address your concerns directly. This is something we take very seriously, and since the event, we have begun to take numerous steps to address this regrettable and unfortunate situation. I'd like to talk with you so I can update you on what we're doing as well as hear more from you, so we learn from this mistake. If you would be interested in speaking with me, please let me know how best to reach you and when you might be available.

Sincerely,

Elie Dekel. (Native Appropriations)

Keene then outlines how the company also reached out to Dr. Jessica Metcalfe of *Beyond Buckskin*, which led to a conference call and several monumental decisions by Paul Frank's president including the removal of all 'Native-inspired' designs from their collections and the start of a new collaboration with contemporary Native designers. Keene was beside herself with excitement and once again reached out to thank the community that she worked so hard to build:

I want to thank all of you who've been involved with this since the beginning – this was truly the result of some incredible community mobilization. The outpouring of tweets and facebook comments throughout this all has been what has kept the company accountable and started the ball rolling to make some real and meaningful change. This was all you!



Welcome to 2012 friends, when an incredibly spread-out, incredibly diverse community of Native people and allies can unite for a cause, and use the internet to hold multi-million dollar companies accountable. I'm so proud to be Native right now. Today is an awesome day. (Native Appropriations)

This is the power and potential of cyberspace when one Cherokee woman decided that she wanted to write about the misappropriation of her culture and other Native cultures. Seven days passed from the event to the phone conversation that began real change in the Paul Frank case. Similarly, the backlash against Victoria's Secret runway show images of model Karlie Kloss in a random assortment of 'Native-inspired' attire includes a floor-length Plains-style headdress, Navajo-inspired turquoise jewelry, and a strange leopard bikini was swift, as was the company's response. Soon after Keene's Victoria's Secret post, an online petition was launched against the company, and the VS Facebook page garnered over 600 comments from Natives and Native supporters. The company apologized the next day. In her updated post from September 10, Keene again focused on the community: «Let's celebrate the fact they listened (though they may have to work on the "how to apologize" part). Amazing work mobilizing together everyone! I'm so proud of our community fighting together for what's right» (Native Appropriations). By using intersectional feminist rhetoric that asserts a decolonial story in the digital space, and incorporates her own Cherokee identity and experiences to express resistance and demand change, Keene and her community of supporters won the argument, achieved rhetorical sovereignty over these two companies, and can now claim success with Paul Frank and Victoria's Secret. However, many more companies continue to assert a master narrative that appropriates and misuses cultural symbols and names from Indigenous cultures – the battle with Paul Frank may be over, but the war over misinformed imaginations is just beginning.

## Thread 2: Theory and practice of intersectional rhetoric (and intersectionality)

Both intersectionality and intersectional rhetoric seek to disrupt the hegemonic master narrative that only that which is white and male and wealthy have value, while also honoring the intersections of seemingly disparate realities and ideas; usually the intersections are race, class, and gender. However, in the case of these three contemporary Indigenous women bloggers, the intersections are BOTH race, gender, class, AND multiple discursive conventions and persuasive rhetorical forms. The leading scholar of intersectional rhetoric is rhetorical scholar Darrel Enck-Wanzer, whose definition: «What is meant by 'intersectional rhetoric,' here, is a rhetoric that places multiple rhetorical forms on relatively equal footing, is not leader-centered, and draws from a number of diverse discursive political or rhetorical conventions» (177). Indigenous feminist bloggers may not be associated with one individual movement, but they are an integral force in the overall effort of contemporary indigenous peoples to gain visibility in mainstream American culture. And using Enck-Wanzer's definition as a guide, one can see the expansive potential of intersectional rhetoric in the practices of indigenous feminist bloggers. These women use multiple discursive forms for persuasion such as participation in indigenous movements of Idle No More and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, public speaking engagements that are recorded as videos and shared online, podcasts, appearances in media interviews, writing on blogs and in print, active posting on social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram, and providing links to their public discourse on their blogs and web sites.

Furthermore, these indigenous feminist bloggers also embrace and draw from a number of diverse rhetorical and political conventions, such as rhetorical sovereignty, intersectionality, inclusive and exclusionist rhetoric, storytelling, indigenous feminism, promoting sovereignty and rejecting assimilation and oppression, and racial identity as tradition. What these indigenous women are doing is both/and, not either/or. Storytelling is BOTH a powerful rhetorical strategy AND a powerful political convention. Rhetorical sovereignty is BOTH a powerful result when Indigenous peoples act on the right to their own words and voices AND a persuasive political tactic. Indigenous feminism is BOTH a rhetorical strategy AND a political position. This weaving together of multiple forms and purposes exemplifies intersectional rhetoric. By interweaving these conventions and strategies, all three indigenous feminist bloggers persuade their audiences that their intersectional identities (race, gender, class, colonized) are as valuable as their non-indigenous women blogger counterparts. And by embracing the complexity of form and rhetorical conventions, they persuade their audiences, and demonstrate with each new post why their practice is so essential to the overarching objective of many indigenous peoples: recognition that they are still here and that their voices, ideas, and contributions have value.

Challenging the master narrative is also a goal of intersectionality, a theory that «focuses awareness on people and experiences – hence, on social forces and dynamics – that, in monocular vision, are overlooked [...] categories that had been uniform and few become modulated and variegated as well as many», according to Catherine A. MacKinnon (1020). When Lisa Charleyboy (T'silhqot'in – Raven Clan) launched *Urban Native Magazine* in 2013, «pop culture with an Indigenous twist», she wanted to focus on indigenous voices. According to an interview with *Shedoesthecity.com* in 2013, Charleyboy said, «I really hope to create a magazine for Indigenous youth to be able to see themselves reflected [...]. Native people are often reflected negatively in mainstream media and I want a place where role models and success stories can be highlighted in a way that young people can relate to. I also hope it can be a space to break down stereotypes about Native people and show the diversity of our people». The diversity of experience represented on the pages, the blog, the Twitter feed, and other social media outlets of *Urban Native Magazine* are ignored by mainstream American press.

Andre Favors cites Kimberlé Crenshaw's research noting that her work on intersectionality «demonstrates that those with intersectional identities often get overlooked or their concerns are elided in public discourse» (16). In Charleyboy's case, she has at least three identities: she is a young First Nations woman looking to reach indigenous youth, whose concerns are often overlooked by most scholars, teachers, and yes, feminists. American K-12 and university students are likewise blind to Indigenous experiences, but when given the chance to learn about real Native peoples, the opportunity for coalition-building is a tangible outcome. Conceiving of identities intersectionally is Elizabeth Cole's 2008 contribution to this theory discussion, as raised by Anna Carastathis who writes that «critics argue that because intersectionality reveals intragroup difference, it inevitably leads to divisions, rifts, and particularisms [...]. They view the political implications of intersectionality as splitting, receding, or narrow identity-based organizing – not unity across lives of difference» (942). Cole's research informs Carastathis's argument by presenting intersectionality not as divisive, but as a coalition-building cooperative movement asserting that «Identities are also potential coalitions, in the sense that when viewed intersectionally they illuminate interconnections and interrelations, as well as grounds for solidarity» (946). Solidarity between

interconnected groups of indigenous peoples across age, education, geographical, and gender boundaries, as well as the potential for feminist solidarity between indigenous women and non-indigenous women are just a few coalitions that can result when Indigenous feminist bloggers take their words, art, and identity-reinforcing projects onto the interwebs.

## **Practitioner 2: Beyond Buckskin. Dr. Jessica Metcalfe (Turtle Mountain Chippewa)**

Dr. Jessica Metcalfe created the *Beyond Buckskin* blog in 2009 to celebrate, promote, and empower Native American artists and designers. She embraces her own rhetorical sovereignty, as well as her feminist community-building, and decolonial actions and words, «Inspired by relevant historical and contemporary Native American clothing design and art, Beyond Buckskin promotes cultural appreciation, social relationships, authenticity and creativity» (*Beyond Buckskin*). At the Indigenous New Media Symposium, Metcalfe shared her blog's origin story, challenges, and successes. *Beyond Buckskin* grew out of Metcalfe's frustration with her limited academic audience as she worked on her dissertation, which focused on Native American designers of high fashion:

I was interviewing the designers themselves, they were sharing their stories with me, they were sharing their struggles, they were sharing their successes and they were even handing over their personal pictures, images, or brochures, so I could be collecting this archive of information about the Native American fashion movement from the 1940s to the present. I wanted to get this information out to a broader audience. (inms2014.com)

Metcalfe reviewed her first blog post where she articulates her hopes and dreams for the blog and acknowledges to the Symposium audience that those have been «surpassed many times over». As a tireless advocate for Native American designers, Metcalfe interviews Native artists for the blog so her audience can «learn more about the diversity of contemporary Native fashion designers from streetwear artists to somebody like Avis O'Brien from the Northwest coast who weaves these beautiful accessories with cedar bark» (inms2014.com). She also composes posts that showcase historical and traditional clothing that «forces us to think about warriors as also artists and historians because they painted their personal feats in battle on their shirt and these personal feats would later go on to become community histories» (inms2014.com). Disrupting structural patriarchal assumptions about Native men's roles as head of the family and the sole decision-makers in the community, as well as Eurocentric cultural assumptions that Native peoples are primitive and inferior relics of the past, Metcalfe provides a valuable counterpoint to prevailing mainstream sentiments about both the realities of past Native peoples, and the existence of contemporary Indigenous peoples. She requires her audience to think in terms of 'both/and', instead of 'either/or', and this more complex way of thinking resists both colonialism and patriarchy, and reinforces her Native designer communities' rhetorical sovereignty.

Metcalfe's commitment to re-claiming cyberspace for Native American fashion designers provides both a hopeful counterpoint and a visual/textual resistance to American culture's appropriation and misrepresentation of 'Native American-inspired' designs. Whereas Keene highlights, analyzes, and dismantles these misrepresentations, Metcalfe attempts to focus on contemporary Native designers, but finds herself unable to avoid the colonialist narrative that embraces stereotypes and misinformed assumptions

about Native peoples. «Adrienne can't be the only one critiquing this stuff [...] we need many people talking about this stuff», Metcalfe said in her INMS presentation, showing an image of a model with spread winged arms for Adidas® by Jeremy Scott that «ripped off a totem pole by a wood carver of the Northwest coast» (inms2014.com). Metcalfe's solidarity with a fellow blogger reinforces how important these cyber counter narratives are to changing the present and future for Native peoples.

Metcalfe also encounters some resistance alongside the accolades as she attempts to provide a strong counter narrative about Native fashion and design to a broader audience. In fact, it is when Metcalfe attempts some lighthearted posts showing misuses of Native-inspired design such as crotch feathers that result in the most resistance and angry kickback, «people get really mad at me for advising that they don't wear crotch feathers», Metcalfe said. One such post is «20 Signs You Are a 'Native American-Inspired' Hot Mess» from December 11, 2012. The post reveals a list and Metcalfe's introduction that is a critical invitation to those who recognize themselves in her list that is «dedicated to all those individuals out there who take Native-Inspiration to Hot Mess status. We love you, but please consider taking it down a notch» (beyondbucks.com). Using photographs, memes, and words in this list, Metcalfe uses second person to address her audience. For example, number one advises «You think that the perfect accessory for your leopard print bikini underwear is a Plains Indian headdress», which pairs with the photograph of a young white woman wearing a white body suit with colorful crotch feathers and an elaborate faux headdress. Other criticisms include «After a few beers, you confess to your Native American friend that you wish you were an Indian too», and «You got permission from your "Indian friend" to misappropriate that "Indian thing" that you love» (beyondbucks.com). Metcalfe challenges American colonial cultural practices and the excuses that non-Natives use to justify their misappropriation of Native culture and sacred objects. In this way, Metcalfe's intersectional rhetoric challenges prior constructions of 'American Indian', and strives to alter public consciousness about who indigenous peoples are today.

Most telling are the comments reacting to this post. One respondent with the screen name «Nature Punk», declares, «Hey guess what? I'm the person in that last photo, and let me tell you for a fact that I claim no affiliation with Native culture whatsoever. My headdresses, and indeed, all my work with animal remains, is part of my own pre-Christian pagan beliefs which are completely independent from and have nothing to do with any form of North American spirituality» (beyondbucks.com). Another respondent fires back, «Which beliefs might these be, NP?». This type of comment attempts to silence a confident Native woman blogger's criticism by pulling attention away from her objective and placing the focus on the white person's right to appropriate symbols and images in any way he or she sees fit. Opening the boutique allowed Metcalfe to «push Native fashion forward» by offering interested consumers options that aren't «cheap knock-offs» of Native cultures. This practical action also demonstrates Metcalfe's commitment to authenticity as a replacement for stereotypes. In her presentation, Metcalfe issues a critical challenge to her live and cyberspace audiences that also draws attention to the production, labor, and economic issues related to stereotyped misappropriation:

Stereotypes continue to be one of the main challenges that we're up against. People expect that Native fashion has to have fringe, it has to have turquoise, it has to have feathers, and yes, some of it does, but not all of it should have to have that in order to be accepted as Native American fashion. Another huge challenge that we have is cheap knock-offs [...]

so Forever 21 and Urban Outfitters, H&M, these different major companies that are selling fully beaded bracelets for \$1.99 [...]. Do you want to invest in a company that is outsourcing and creating a very problematic situation of labor problems, unethical business, or do you want to purchase from an artist and promote those ideas of creativity, uniqueness, rarity. (inms2014.com)

Metcalf's challenge at INMS resounds throughout her blog posts as she uses the multiple rhetorical forms of language, photographs, Native artist profiles, logic, and emotional appeal to inform, critique, and educate a broader audience about a decolonized and technologically advanced Indigenous presence in the fashion world.

### Thread 3: Indigenous Feminism

The decolonial objectives of these blogs suggests that these authors and activists are Indigenous feminists who are re-conceptualizing, resisting, and re-framing both colonialism and patriarchy. All of these actions require boundary-crossings and boundary-breakings, which is something that feminist theorists have been advocating for a long time. For instance, in *The Intersectional Approach*, Analouise Keating writes about "Lessons for Transformation in the Radical Writings by Women of Color", focusing primarily on Gloria Anzaldúa's idea of

nepantla, a Nahuatl word meaning 'in-between space'. For Anzaldúa, nepantla represents an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, and transitional space/time/epistemology lacking clear boundaries, directions, or definitions [...]. Boundaries become more permeable and begin breaking down. This loosening of previously restrictive labels, while intensely painful, can create shifts in consciousness and transgressive opportunities for change. (Berger & Guidroz 94)

The nature of decolonization can be found in this idea of «nepantla» and the radical and boundary-busting practice of Indigenous women blogging in 2018.

To build on this idea of decolonial actions that cross and challenge boundaries, Joyce Green suggests that aboriginal feminism is a praxis tool for challenging and dismantling racism and colonialism:

Aboriginal feminism brings together the two critiques, feminism and anti-colonialism, to show how Aboriginal peoples, and in particular Aboriginal women, are affected by colonialism and by patriarchy. It takes account of how both racism and sexism fuse when brought to bear on Aboriginal women. While colonial oppression is identified, so too is oppression of women by Indigenous men and Indigenous governance practices. Aboriginal feminists are the clearest in linking sex and race oppression. They are identified as political adversaries not only by colonial society but also by male Indigenous elites whose power they challenge. And they are also criticized by some Aboriginal women, who deny their analysis and question their motives and authenticity. (23)

As Green notes, Indigenous feminism remains a fraught political idea and practice with many perspectives and opinions within Indigenous communities. For instance, Andrea Smith argues that Indigenous feminism is much more complicated than it is assumed to be. She cites some of these critiques of feminism including the idea that feminism is an imperial project that reinforces racist, colonialist mentality especially in relation to sovereignty issues. She writes, «The very simplified manner in which Native

women's activism is theorized straightjackets Native women from articulating political projects that both address sexism and promote Indigenous sovereignty simultaneously» (95). Smith critiques this simplification and the impulse that some scholars have to separate gender and racial justice: «Women of color have for too long been presented with the choices of prioritizing either racial justice or gender justice. This dualistic analysis fails to recognize that it is through sexism and gender violence that colonialism and white supremacy have been successful» (103).

On the other hand, Kim Anderson (Cree-Metis) argues that «there are many kinds of feminism», including her idea that «Indigenous feminism is linked to a foundational principle in Indigenous societies – that is, the profound reverence for life» (81). In particular, Anderson suggests that «Indigenous feminism is about creating a new world out of the best of the old. Indigenous feminism is about honoring creation in all its forms, while also fostering the kind of critical thinking that will allow us to stay true to our traditional reverence for life [...]. We especially need to learn about the feminist elements of our various Indigenous traditions and begin to celebrate and practice them» (89). Along these lines, for many Native women writers, including Lee Maracle, Metis writer and «resistance fighter against the forces of oppression and assimilation», the «primary aim of writing is to serve the well-being of their own peoples and the generations to come» (Bowerbank 565). Maracle writes that as writers, as cultural workers, as «keepers of the truth», women could «struggle modestly» and could come together and overcome the racism and sexism in their ranks (173). In this respect, the decolonial project necessarily intersects with Indigenous feminism. Not all Indigenous women self-identify as feminists, but even when they do not, their agendas and purpose in the public act of writing do suggest a feminist motivation coupled with an inherent decolonial belief in rhetorical sovereignty that might be at work and it is from this foundation that the analyses of indigenous feminist bloggers emerge.

### Practitioner 3: Urban Native Girl/Urban Native Magazine: Lisa Charleyboy (Tsilhqot'in (Dene), Mexican, Cherokee, and Dutch)

Storyteller and social entrepreneur Lisa Charleyboy disrupts patriarchal colonial discourse with her blog *Urban Native Girl* («Pop culture with an Indigenous twist»), which expanded in 2013 into the launch of a Native lifestyle online publication, *Urban Native Magazine*. Charleyboy uses her intersectional rhetoric to achieve rhetorical sovereignty by inspiring Native youth and connecting «with Native people from all across Turtle Island (North America)» (lisacharleyboy.com). Although her focus leans toward fashion, Charleyboy's activist tendencies shine in writing and actions. For instance, three of her early posts in 2014 focused on skin care, boots, and spring cleaning. But a close reading of these posts reveals a wise and humorous young woman who is self-aware and connected with her culture and the politics surrounding it. In fact, her cultural background and feminism work together to dismantle the patriarchy and colonialist binaries.

Interspersed with the light-hearted, yet honest, descriptive paragraphs are scanned images of old text passages referencing missionaries, semi-nomadic housing (with photo), and the altering of traditional lifestyles of Tsilhqot'in people. Charleyboy begins by referencing her 'spring state of mind', talking about how she might give her parka away to Goodwill she is so ready for spring, and being ready for spring cleaning. So far, these are all universal issues that any reader can identify with, especially those who have

suffered frigid winter temperatures. Charleyboy then exerts authority and ownership over her own identity by sharing a story about first moving out on her own at 17 and how that has led to living in almost every neighborhood in Toronto. She admits: «I didn't anticipate that I would become this nomadic being when I moved out so young» (lisacharleyboy.com).

The stories of experience that follow walk readers through her first «slick downtown condo» that featured a concierge, pool, and ensuite laundry, but that a year later, she «got the itch» to move. Next up was an «airy loft with 14 feet ceilings, a skylight, and white brick walls and concrete floors», but she was a disenchanted fashion student and had to move again. When she left the loft, she gave away, repurposed, or left most of her belongings with friends and neighbors. «I just felt over it all. I moved to a new neighbourhood and started from scratch, this time with an entirely new recipe. That cycle has never really left me» (lisacharleyboy.com).

It is at this point in the post that Charleyboy inserts a scanned text image that reads «The missionaries were of the opinion that: “Every means should therefore be taken to bring the nomad tribes to abandon their wandering life and to build houses, cultivate fields and practice the elementary crafts of civilized life”». Charleyboy shares a screen shot of a Facebook status update that said, «I've been in my place for 20 months and have yet to put up a piece of artwork. I always figured I'd be moving soon... as I usually do. I guess it's time to put up some artwork and give the cat a name». Playfulness aside, Charleyboy acknowledges that days later, she again felt the itch to change:

There is that inner semi-nomadic Tsihqot'in in me that never wants to have more than would be able to easily pack up in a car. I generally always want to be ready to pick up and move in a moment's notice. I usually even have a closet full of boxes just in case I get that urge [...]. I suspect that there are many Indigenous people out there like myself who embrace their inner nomad and just live life to the fullest without ALL of the stuff. (lisacharleyboy.com)

Charleyboy shares this revelation with readers, linking her people's past to her personal present, criticizing modern societal expectations to own all the stuff, and revealing a growing acceptance of her nomadic roots, which must be an inspiration to other Indigenous women experiencing similar feelings. Concluding her post with another text scan seems to solidify her resolve to accept her nomadic tendencies, and by extension, imply that her readers should reject official and unofficial forms of cultural and patriarchal subjugation:

There is no evidence to support a conclusion that Aboriginal people ever lived this kind of postage stamp existence. Tsihqot'in people were semi-nomadic and moved with the seasons over various tracts of land within their vast territory. It was government policy that caused them to alter their traditional lifestyle and live on reserves. (lisacharleyboy.com)

### 3. A Story to Come: An Invitation to Participate

Consider this an invitation to rethink the limits of 'rhetoric' as practiced in our modern age.

Intersectional rhetoric gives rhetorical scholars a chance to expand upon our developing understanding of how marginalized peoples craft power through rhetoric. It

is a nonlinear, interconnected, and interwoven practice of persuasion that refuses to privilege any one mode or be disciplined by colonial discourse while helping these women achieve rhetorical sovereignty. The effectiveness and reach of these bloggers depends on new readers who share their words in classrooms, on social media, and in face to face conversations. Progress is slow, but steady, as more indigenous feminists take up blogging as a way to disrupt colonial discourse, advance their traditional and cultural perspectives, and achieve rhetorical sovereignty for themselves and their communities.

Consider the exciting possibilities when scholars, teachers, activists, and feminists discard easy categories and linear definitions.

As you consider this invitation to embrace complexity, discover these writer-activists, and incorporate them into your writings, research, and teachings, remember to share what you now know because, as Thomas King writes, «Don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now» (167).

Consider embracing the mess.

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