

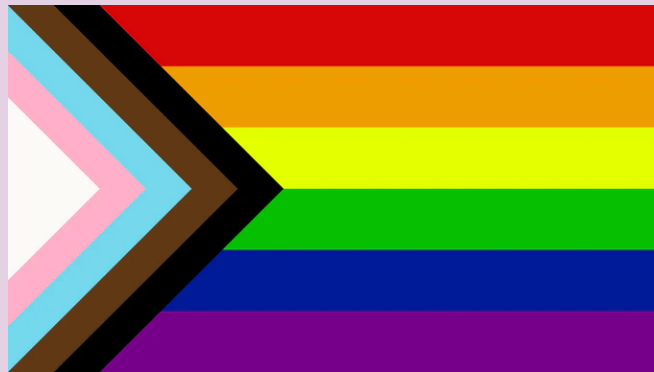
2SLGBTQIA+  
BLACK  
INDIGENOUS  
PEOPLE OF COLOUR  
*Voices in History*

**SISTER  
VISION  
PRESS**

LE CENTRE CANADIEN DE LA  
**DIVERSITÉ DES GENRES**  
+ DE LA **SEXUALITÉ**



THE CANADIAN CENTRE FOR  
**GENDER+SEXUAL  
DIVERSITY**



**Content Warning:**  
**Racism, Sexism, Homophobia**

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# The Founders



Image Source: Cooper, Afua. "Out of a Cardboard Box beside Our Bed like a Baby: The Founders of Sister Vision Press." In *Great Dames* edited by Elspeth Cameron and Janice Dickinson. Toronto, London, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1997.

Makeda Silvera (pictured left) and her partner, Stephanie Martin (pictured right) founded Sister Vision Press in 1985 with the mandate to publish Black women and women of colour's (WOC) voices.

Silvera was motivated to start Sister Vision Press when publishers refused to print her book, *Silenced: Talks with Working Class Caribbean Women about Their Lives and Struggles as Domestic Workers in Canada*, because many of the interviews were transcribed in Creole.

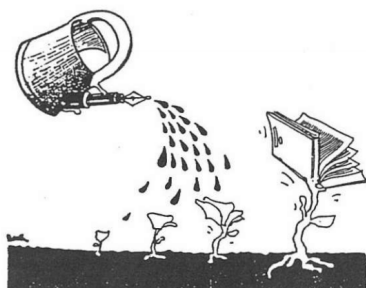
There was a general reluctance to publish Black women and WOC's writing because it was deemed too 'sad,' 'angry,' or 'autobiographical.' Most presses undervalued, misunderstood, or had no interest in Black women and WOC's identities and sexualities.

Martin and Silvera faced twice the difficulty when trying to publish their work as the result of their intersectional identities. As lesbians of colour, their work was judged by traditional and women's presses on the basis of their race and their sexual orientation. Yet, when Martin and Silvera approached several Black presses in Canada, they were met with a reluctance to publish lesbian voices for fear that it might fracture Black solidarity.

### Sister Vision

Sister Vision is the first press for Black women and women of colour to be established in Canada. It was founded in the summer of 1984 because as Black women and women of colour we feel strongly that more of our works must be published and read.

Through Sister Vision we will encourage works by women of all cultures, sexual preferences and classes.



We made a conscious political decision to distinguish between Black women and women of colour. This is an important distinction because Black women have had a particular historical experience in the world: the experience of slavery and its aftermath. While needing to focus on the consequences of that history we will not be limited by it, and will continue to recognize our commonalities and share the writings of our Native Sisters, our Asian Sisters and others who define themselves as women of colour.

We are also committed to distributing our books to the general Canadian public.

We will focus on four areas. Our first area is dedicated to women's oral history. Through this medium we will present the vivid words and lives of ordinary women often omitted from traditional history and contemporary writing. Our second area is creative writing. We will encourage short story writers, novelists and poets. Our third area will focus on books for children and young people. Publication in this important area has been negligible. Our fourth area is theory and research. We intend to challenge the absence of our voices in Canadian feminist theory and research. We will provide a forum for theoretical works which speak to and analyze the political and social lives of Black and Third World women from a feminist perspective.

With your support, Sister Vision will be part of a continuum of courageous and spirited women engaged in celebrating our strength, our diversity, and shaping the terms of our liberation.

Our tradition includes Marie Joseph Angelique, a Black Montreal slave who launched the first documented act of defiance against slavery; Mary Ann Shadd, the first woman editor in Canada and publisher of one of Canada's early Black newspapers--the Provincial Freeman--in the 1850's; and others whose voices we have never heard.

We want to reforge the links between women of colour in Canada and in the Caribbean and Third World the world over.

Our vision is that of a global feminism, an interconnecting and weaving of our histories.

We are excited about Sister Vision and welcome donations, manuscripts, and ideas.

SISTER VISION  
Black Women and Women of Colour Press  
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Above are excerpts from the socialist feminist bulletin, *Cayenne*, Volume 1, Number 3 (May/June 1985), mentioning Sister Vision Press and their feminist mandate, goals, and vision.

# Choosing a Name

In an interview with prominent writer and academic, Afua Cooper, Makeda Silvera and Stephanie Martin explained the reasoning behind the name, Sister Vision:

**SILVERA:** "We saw the vision certainly of the press being one that published stuff by women of colour; so hence the name 'sister.' We also had at that point a vision of a whole group of women of colour working collectively against all odds, coming out with books, working to make a new reality. I think why we chose the name Sister Vision and not Martin-Silvera was that we felt other artists in the same kind of position as us — marginalized artists of colour—would join in and share that vision."

**MARTIN:** "Yes, the vision was to make a publishing house for women and all the possibilities that that entailed."



# A Labour of Love

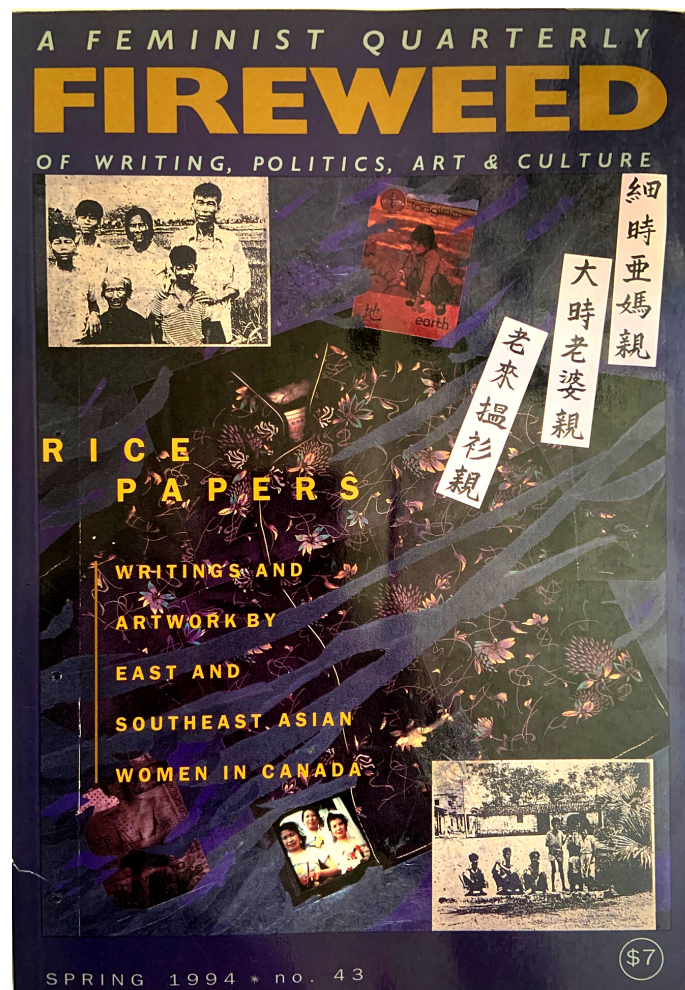
Silvera and Martin both worked full-time jobs and invested their savings into Sister Vision. In the beginning, Sister Vision was a box of files kept next to their bed "like a baby." After a while, Silvera asked *Fireweed: A Feminist Quarterly* if they could operate Sister Vision out of a corner of their office space.

Silvera had been working with *Fireweed* for seven years when she approached them to borrow office space. *Fireweed* was a significant feminist periodical in Canada, founded in 1978, that published women's writing about politics, art and culture. The founding collective, composed of 24 women, claimed to be committed to the representation of diverse experiences and voices, but early issues of *Fireweed* neglected 2SLGBTQIA+ and BIWOC's voices. The collective was reformed with eight members in 1982 and by the mid-1980s, *Fireweed* began to publish more issues related to QTBIWOC.

Once Sister Vision had outgrown the *Fireweed* office, Silvera and Martin moved Sister Vision into the basement of their home at 101 Dewson Street in Toronto, which doubled as a Black queer activist collective. They held Sister Vision's first book launch in their living room.

*Fireweed* would bring in other collectives and organizations to take over special issues of the publication. An example of this collaboration is the 1994 issue of *Fireweed* entitled *Rice Papers* (pictured right).

This issue highlighted the voices of Asian women in Canada and was guest-edited by Marilyn Jung and Brenda Joy Lem.



# The Titles

Sister Vision's titles featured theory, history, fiction, poetry, young adult and children's books. Sister Vision also published authors with various levels of experience—from established to first-time writers. Their titles often discussed the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality by presenting diverse perspectives and opinions.

**SILVERA & MARTIN:** "Our books challenge sexism and heterosexism in our respective communities and racism, bias and prejudice in Euro-Centric communities."

Sister Vision also collaborated with feminist and women's organizations across the Caribbean, Great Britain, Southern Africa, India, and North America. For instance, they worked with the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA) in Trinidad and Tobago to publish *Creation fire: a CAFRA Anthology of Caribbean Women Poets* (1990). This book connected women throughout the Caribbean and Caribbean diaspora in many languages such as English, French, Creole, Dutch, Spanish, and Papiementu.

Some of their other titles include:

*Mà-ka: Diasporic Juks—Contemporary Writing by Queers of African Descent*  
edited by Debbie Douglas, Makeda Silvera, Courtney McFarlane, and  
Douglas Stewart

*Piece of My Heart: a Lesbian of Colour Anthology*  
by Makeda Silvera

*The Very Inside: an Anthology of Writings by Asian and Pacific Island  
Lesbians and Bisexual Women*  
edited by Sharon Lim-Hing

*"... but where are you really from?": Stories of Identity and Assimilation in  
Canada*  
anthologized by Hazelle Palmer

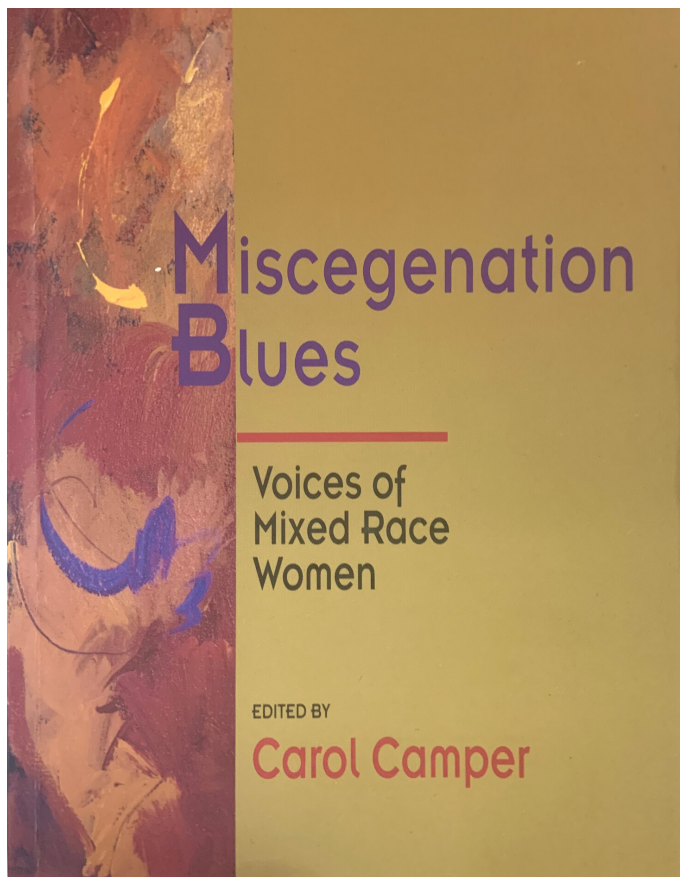
*The Colour of Resistance: A Contemporary Collection of Writing by  
Aboriginal Women*  
anthologized by Connie Fife

# Miscegenation Blues

One of their books, *Miscegenation Blues: Voices of Mixed Race Women* (1984) edited by Carol Camper, reflects the diversity of women represented throughout Sister Vision's titles. Camper explains in her introduction that she grew up feeling isolated, exoticized, and targeted as a mixed-race woman in London, Ontario.

She named the anthology *Miscegenation Blues* as a way to counter racist and sexist stereotypes about mixed race women as morally and sexually degenerate. These stereotypes had historically motivated miscegenation laws—or laws across North America that prevented marriage and relationships between those of white descent and those of Black, Indigenous, or non-white descent. Camper explains that this racist history made her think that the 'mis' in 'miscegenation' stood for "error" or "wrong" when, in fact, the root of the word is 'misc' meaning mixed.

The anthology features poetry, essays, and fiction that "document the lives" of mixed-race women, allow them to "define themselves," as well as "connect with one another and examine some of the challenges they face."



**SILVERA:** "To me, our greatest success has been the many anthologies that we have published, which have given voice to a diversity of women.

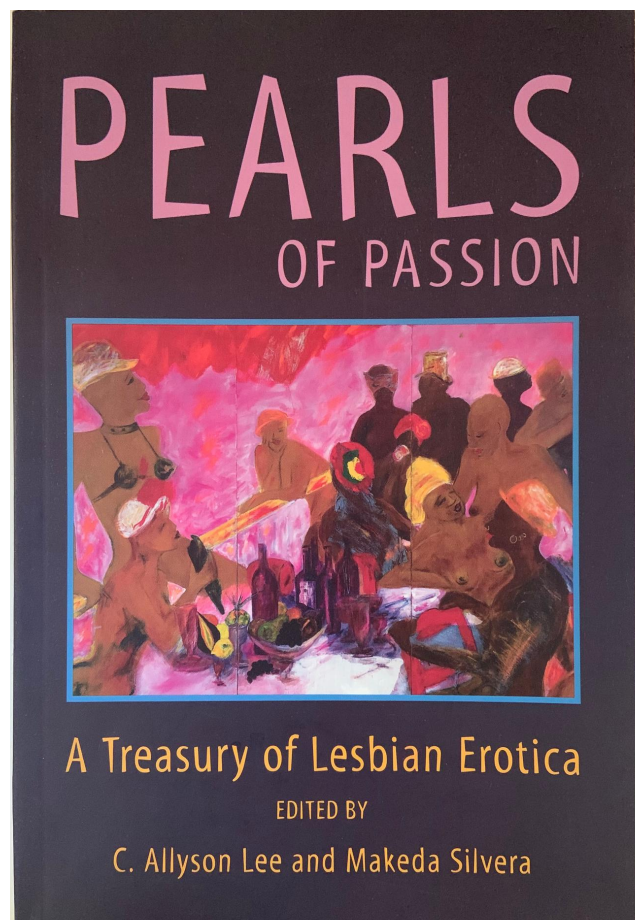
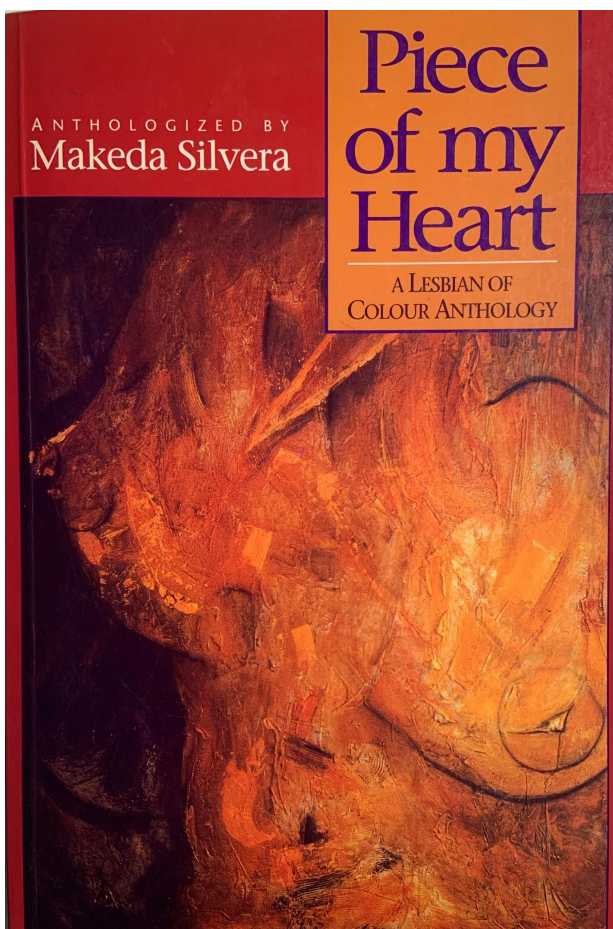
The mixed race anthology *Miscegenation Blues: Voices of Mixed Race Women* was an innovative piece of work and has been quite successful. We are the first press in Canada to publish something of that nature. For us it was a risk because we didn't know how the market would receive it."



# Queer Trans BIWOC

Many of Sister Vision's titles recognized 2SLGBTQIA+ Black, Indigenous, and women of colour's unique identities and experiences as racialized and queer. They also gave them an outlet for discussion, reflection, and visibility on their own terms. Sister Vision and their titles thus represent a rare space of kinship for QTBIWOC in Canadian history.

**SILVERA:** "I believe we are more in tune with issues around diversity not only because we are lesbians but lesbians of colour who have to deal very much with a reality of race and colour. This forces us to be much more sensitive. And I feel all the multiple realities that we deal with are pluses for us."

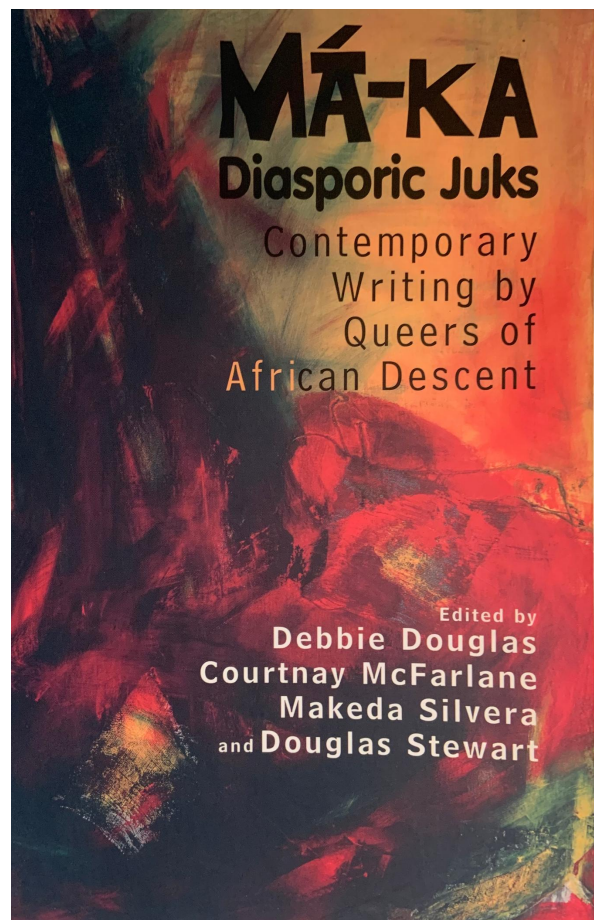
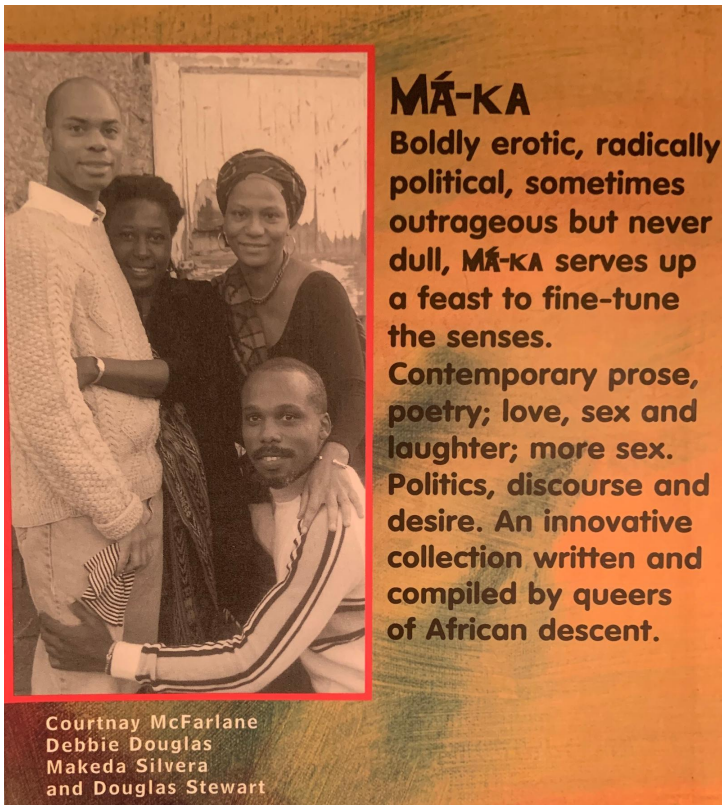


# Legacy

Sister Vision published over 50 titles until the press ceased operations in 2001. Their books featured diverse stories that discussed themes of race, class, sexuality, belonging, identity, discrimination, community, and love.

They highlighted the rarely discussed experiences of QTBIWOC in Canada that remain difficult to find today. Sister Vision gave voice to the silenced, but it also built a space of community and solidarity for QTBIWOC by QTBIWOC.

QTBIWOC may find themselves represented in the pages of Sister Vision's titles in complex, emotional, and meaningful ways.



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