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“The Blessed Hybridity” in Vizenor’s Utopian Point of Assinika: Dismantling the Notion of the ‘*invented indian*’ in *The Heirs of Columbus*.

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Abstract

Native American written Literature which dates back in history to the end of the 19th century witnessed its 'Renaissance' in the mid-20th century, tackling issues of identity and self-actualization. Among the most well-known literary figures of the time stands Gerald Vizenor, an author and a theoretician, whose literary oeuvre has enriched both mainstream and ethnic American canon and whose novel *The Heirs of Columbus* (1991) is the focus of this paper.

In this novel Vizenor re-imagines the history of discovering America from the perspective of the indigenous. He wrote it contemporaneous with the quincentenary of Columbus's arrival to the New Land. The author inverts the historical records and presents Columbus as a returning descendant of the Mayan tribe implementing his own theory of 'survivance' and the '*invented indian*' and deconstructing the stereotypical representations of the colonizer and the natives.

This paper is a reading that attempts to scrutinize the novel in the light of Homi Bhabha's concept of the "Blessed Hybridity", as well as Vizenor's theories of "survivance" and the "*invented indian*" in which he maintains that sovereignty and actualization can only happen through realizing and acknowledging the hybrid or what he calls the "mixedblood" or "crossblood" not only of the natives, but of all human beings. Therefore, the novel presents the heirs as a 'new' product of the two cultures who exist to challenge all previous Western representations of the Native Indians, hence facilitating their 'survivance' and actualization. The 'heirs' here are the grand children of Columbus who not only claim their rights as heirs, but also claim having a curing gene in their DNA, since they carry the Mayan gene that previously cured Columbus himself.

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Introduction: An overview of the emergence and development of Native American Literature

In his book *Native American Renaissance* (1985), Kenneth Lincoln, like many other literary critics, considers the middle decades of the twentieth century as the 'Renaissance' of Native American Literature, an era characterized by the 1934-Wheeler-Howard Indian Reorganization Act, which led to the loss of a great amount of lands preserved by the natives and their subsequent immigration to big cities. This incident led to the emergence of themes like alienation in the works of many Native American authors like Lynn Riggs who wrote about the spiritual value of the land and the disintegration of the native individual identity away from the land-based livelihood. Authors like John Joseph Mathews and D'Arcy McNickle, who were of mixed-blood, and who received their education in English schools, either in Europe or in the big American cities, wrote on the law of allotted lands and its effect on the Natives' communities and identity. Mathews' *Talking To the Moon* (1945) and McNickle's *Wind From The Enemy Sky* (1978) are considered landmarks of the Native American literature of the time. The protagonist in these works must face the decision of whether to accept or reject this native culture. This conflict usually hovers throughout the novel but is left unresolved at the end, as maintained by Colonnese and Owens (1985).

The Publication of Vine Deloria Jr.'s *Custer Died For Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (1969), signaled the late twentieth century blooming of Native American Resistance Literature, which was further accentuated with the works of N.Scott Momaday's first novel *House Made of Dawn*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1969. This work inspired many Native American authors such as James Welch, Linda Hogan, Diana Glancy, and more importantly, Leslie Marmon Silko, who is famous for her poetry anthology *Voices of the Rainbow* (1975), and whose career prospered with the publication of her novel *Ceremony* (1977).

It is significant that most of these authors integrated native American myths, which remained a defining characteristic of Native American literature. They weaved stories of the arrival of the "Whiteman" and the emergence of the mixed-blood generation with oral tradition and postmodern features of narration. Here, J. Ortiz stands out as an influential writer who inspired many authors like Gerald Vizenor, who started writing in 1969, and whose work, *The Heirs of Columbus* (1991), will be the focus of this paper.

Besides his interest in publishing essays and fiction, Vizenor developed a theoretical approach to the Native Indian identity where he favored liberation from all kinds of racial, national, social and cultural dominances, as well as transformation into independency and freedom of choice, rather than passively defending the Native identity. His outstanding approach and illuminating perspective of the mixed-blood person as being

more creative, challenges old stereotypes of natives and informs most of his works. Works like *Earth Divers: The Tribal Narration on Mixed Blood* (1981), *Griever: An American Monkey King in China* (1979), *Landfill Meditation* (1991), and *Chancers* (2000), employ the character of the trickster, as a compassionate mixed-blood persona, one who is attached to tradition, and through whom most of the Native Americans' dilemmas and problems are resolved. His notion of the 'invented indian', which will be here discussed, is one of the most important theories where Vizenor mainly challenges stereotyping the American Indian as either a 'noble savage', a dying warrior or a mysterious stranger. Janette K. Murry believes this stereotyping to be the main responsibility of authors like Helen Hunt Jackson "who knew Indians and presented them with authenticity, ... and who was sympathetic to the Indian" (157), in a harmful way from Vizenor's perspective, since it made other writers of her variety greatly overshadowed by "the sentimentalists and sensationalists who created the mythological American Indian." (Murry, 158)

In his book *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indians Scenes of Absence and Presence* (1998), Vizenor introduces the term 'survivance' and maintains that "Survivance in the sense of native survivance is more than survival, more than endurance or mere response" (15). He asserts that it is an active sense of presence over historical absence, uprooting, and extinction. This notion of survivance is obvious in Native stories through natural reason, dynamic traditions, customs, and narrative resistance and is evidently visible in the native characters' personal traits presented in *The Heirs of Columbus*, such as humor, spirit, and moral courage in the different literary works. He also asserts that "Native identities are more than nominal considerations; true, natives have endured centuries of separation ... and disappearance, but the tragic wisdom of their *survivance* has been converted by many academics to an aesthetic victimary." (21) The acts of 'survivance' fortifies the energetic and enduring heart of the Native Indians well beyond the colonizers' attempts of absence, tragedy, and subjection. Vizenor argues that many people in the world are infatuated with and obsessed by the concocted images of the *indian*—the simulations of indigenous character and cultures as essential victims.

Latin American Literature and the question of postcoloniality

Whereas Aijaz Ahmad discusses the meaning of the term and provides a historical framing of all the colonies tracing that back to the "Inacs, the Ottomans and the Chinese, well before the European Colonial empires began ... and cover all kinds of national oppression" (Ahmed 9), thus limiting the meaning of the term to the chronological factor only, Peter Childs and J.R. Patrick Williams, widen the scope to indicate more: "The other meanings of post- is one ... conceptually transcending or superseding

the parameters of the other term." (Childs and Williams 4). This definition is significant in the sense that it relates to all the anti-colonial texts not necessarily through rejecting all the premises of the colonialist discourse and intervention, but also those that go beyond the concept of colonization as will be illustrated in *The Heirs of Columbus*. Such texts break free of all the well-known definitions of colonialism, to the extent of counterattacking the 'colonizer', as well as the long-perceived concept of the 'victimized' subject. Thus, they can be considered a counter discourse that opposes all the inscriptions of the Euro-American 'colonizer'. And since Vizenor is already considered a postmodern author, his work can easily be read as a "discursive practice of prominent *resistance* to colonialism, colonialist ideologies and their contemporary forms of subjectifactory legacies" (Adam and Tiffin XII), where he, like most post-colonial, postmodern intellectuals, dreams of –and sometimes offers- a Utopian dimension of collectivity.

When Aijaz Ahmad pronounces his dissatisfaction with periodizing the colonial experience which privileges, as primary, the role of colonialism as the principle of structuration in that history, so that all that came before colonialism becomes its own prehistory and whatever comes after can only be lived as infinite aftermath" (Ahmed 6-7), he accentuates a fundamental issue, namely, the native history, which is the original history of the land and the people. History here is a crucial dimension that needs to be asserted and defined clearly for the sake of differing the appalling imperial discourse that consistently denies its existence. Thus, the attempt to write history, or in Vizenor's case, re-write it, from the Natives' point of view, can be clearly read as an act of resistance, or avoidance of what Ashcroft calls "the radical othering and violent annexation of the non-European word." (Ashcroft 355)

In *The Heirs of Columbus*, Gerald Vizenor, endows the indigenous with the privilege to re-imagine not only their history, but that of a whole continent. The narrative presents another version of the "official history" where the Euro-Americans lose sovereignty and superiority. It is a context where "the Western Metropole must confront its post-colonial history ... as an indigenous or native narrative internal to its national 'identity'" (Bhabha 1994, 5). Thus, the history narrated by the natives becomes an integral part of their identity and the identity of the 'other'; a particularly significant fact when this 'other' is the colonizer, i.e. Christopher Columbus in Vizenor's work.

Instead of reading Christopher Columbus's voyage as an invasion, Vizenor sees it as a return to the origin or to his 'internal or national identity' as Bhabha suggests. Thus, instead of handling the commonly identified trauma of lost identity or going through the endless painful journey or recovering it, Vizenor and before him Bhabha, questions the originality of the invader, the latter by questioning the meaning of 'who' is the post-colonial, and the former by presenting Columbus himself as a crossblood.

Bhabha’s analyses of colonial relations have been considered complex. Critics like Peter Childs and R.J. Patrick Williams consider his analysis a mixture of “psycho-analysis and Deconstruction” (122), where he examines similarities rather than differences, and thus abolishes the opposition of ‘colonizer/colonized’. He argues that “the objectives of colonial discourse are to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction” (Bhabha 1994, 70). This refers to the representation of both as a means to establish power and authority by installing racial differences. It also subjectifies the colonized, justifies imperialism and leads to the concept of hybridity which interrogates the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, and which can be considered a strategy for resistance.

While Homi Bhabha’s theory of hybridity provides an opportunity to unravel the power relations in the postcolonial era, it also dismisses the possibility of the existence of a pure culture, and thus obliterates the misapprehension between the colonizer and the colonized in terms of power. According to his theory, the victims of the colonized world, previously considered incompetent, can now conceptualize a world governed by different dynamic forces; those of the neocolonial situation where the colonizer can easily be imitated, hence challenged as a pure entity. Bhabha’s theory infers that admitting the colonizer’s authority over the colonized guarantees its continuity to the present and renders the colonized victimized and powerless. The hybrid in this case would be an ambivalent recast to prove the unoriginality through which the colonizer claims superiority. (1994, 29-30) This call to reconsider the unprivileged position of the colonized which has long been taken for granted, challenges the fictional concepts invented to justify the existing structure of domination, making it inevitable to conclude the superiority of one culture over the other. This notion of hybridity defeats the myth of the pure blood and highlights that of mixedblood/crossblood as revealed in Vizenor’s work, an idea which has long been used to advance the imperial agenda.

This definition of hybridity impels reconsidering the historical representation of the Indian Americans and the unprivileged culture. This illustrates Vizenor’s concern with rewriting the history of the New-Found Land in an attempt to dismantle the binary opposition of the colonizer/colonized while at the same time challenging the misrepresentation of the Native Americans through the coined term of *‘invented indian’*. His fictional representation of this revised history touches upon Bhabha’s notion of ‘fluid identity’ and the relationship between the different authorities, to reach the conclusion that identity is mixed, boundary crossing and not limited to blood.

Throughout the novel, Vizenor illustrates how the cultures that existed together in the New-Found Land are different and diverse, yet they are interrelated and can exist in homogeneity and peace, making advantage of this diversity, and creating multiculturalism and harmony in a Utopia-like community. Vizenor allows his readers to re-read history from the point of view of the indigenous. When he highlights the value of crossblood/mixedblood as the base of any community, he also allows for a space of acceptance of the other as they are and of dreaming of an actual 'New World', a utopian one, where the hybrid is the accepted model, and even the deformed is unquestionably accepted. When he deconstructs this controversial issue of hybridity and the reasons behind their marginalization, Vizenor is actually correcting long held misconceptions of the value attached to 'pure' blood. Instead of presenting the hybrid or mixedblood in a 'neither- nor' state, he celebrates their existence and takes it as the standard that would defy the powerful and advantageous eminence of the colonizer.

'Sovereignty' and '*survivance*' can only materialize, in Vizenor's point of view, through the actualization of the 'crossblood', not only of the two cultures, but of humanity in general. The heirs, as a new product of the two cultures, exist to challenge all previous Western representations of the 'Indian', and therefore, facilitate 'survivance' as a form of resistance. An example of the 'crossblood' is the character(s) of the trickster, which will be handled later in details, and a signature character used in many of Vizenor's works, is a shape-shifter in an in-between status who facilitates human relations. Even Christopher Columbus "The Admiral of the Ocean Sea, confirmed in the name of the curia and the Crown ... bore the tribal signature of survivance and ascended the culture of death in the Old World"¹. He is also displaced as a patriarch of the American civilization since 'genetic research' explained in the novel positions him as part of a "genetic frame from the first hand-talkers of creation... [thus, he carried] the unbroken radians" (*Heirs* 132-133) specific of Saman the Mayan goddess, to the old world.

As mentioned above, hybridity is an action to reverse the effect of the colonialist "so that the other 'denied' knowledge enters upon the dominant discourse and estranges the basis of its authority" (*Heirs* 114). Thus, if the Euro-American authority has stereotyped the native in such a way to highlight the differences, through 'whiteness' for example, Vizenor attempts to delineate this difference, decentralize the deferential basis, and displace authority. He also forms the body of resistance against the "*invented indian*", as part of the general refusal of "the narcissistic demands evident in the stereotype" (Childs and Williams 136), which may result in 'paranoia' that would in many cases lead to misjudgment, or even persecution.

Columbus's victory of conquering the New-Found Land is ripped to pieces by presenting a very peaceful transition from the 'old' to the 'new'

worlds, since tribal prophecy already indicates that the “avian time would end with the arrival of the white man” (*Heirs* 5). In *The Heirs of Columbus*, Vizenor reshapes the traditional Native American mythology of Apocalypse in an ironic manner. He redefines its meaning and significance from the point of view of the natives and extends it to work hand in hand with science and technology by integrating genetic research to “trace the healer’s genes.” (161) This integration deconstructs all notions of identity and pure blood sustained by the colonizer. David Morgan believes the apocalypse in Vizenor’s novel to be handled from a perspective different from all Western perception, and that it invokes images of transformational regeneration” of the Native American history and tradition, and in a manner that asserts their presence rather than their absence from the action of existence.” (Morgan 150)

The Trickster in Vizenor's Works:

Once again, and like his previous novel *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles* (1990), Vizenor implements the trickster tradition and character through which he constructs a parallel tale that fits only in traditional Native American Literature and culture: the use of the Native mythic trickster facilitates this “different” interpretation of the conventional history and reality. According to David Morgan, the theme of being caught between two worlds in Native American texts “often becomes a trickster’s story” (158). Such stories are mostly meant to represent regeneration and transformation of the Natives caught in such a state, and who usually work for adaptation and integration. For this purpose, Vizenor implements traditional themes that illustrate the conflict between the ‘traditional’ and the ‘New’ worlds and examines the possibilities of cultural integration where Native Americans are effectively present. He intentionally abolishes the boundaries between these two worlds, depending primarily on the traditional culture, which Morgan refers to as “metaphysics that challenges fundamental Western assumptions about time, space and causality” (160). The conflict is not anymore manifested using words, or the personal transformation through a trickster’s voice like *Bearheart*. It has taken a step further to be a transformation of a whole culture for the cause of integration.

Writing in the language of the ‘invader’, and using the name of the New World’s discoverer, Vizenor reverses the traditional dichotomy of colonizer/colonized and turns Christopher Columbus into a traditional trickster in an attempt to dismantle the commonly held belief, and the long-perceived image of the ‘*invented indian*’ –a term which Vizenor has coined– and where the native is presented as a victimized suppressed being. He alters the language to suit his own purpose, and to be presented in his own ‘terms’, using native vocabulary sometimes, and native ideology all the

time, and turning the whole discourse into 'a new language', consistently referring to the Native Indian Culture as an exhibition of resistance of what Ortiz calls "forced colonization" (8). In this respect, Vizenor supports Weaver's opinion that when the colonized writes, he is "engaged in an act of hybridity because of the supposed European origin of the language and literary endeavors" (qtd in Goncalves XVIII) yet in a unique manner. The hybrid for him is the original: he uses Christopher Columbus's heir, Stone, as his protagonist, and replaces Columbus by the Native in the most authentic sense of the word: a trickster. Thus, with reference to Bhabha's theory of resistance, Vizenor challenges all the past attempts to defeat and displace the Native Indian through relying on the aboriginal to state sovereignty in all cultural and self- governance matters. Hence, he allows for the empowerment of the native employing Owens' opinion of the "process of reconstruction, of self-discovery and cultural recovery ... a re-making or putting together of identity" (12). And when he highlights the importance of the hybrid or the mixedblood, Vizenor also destroys the Natives' conventional dogmatic beliefs and dichotomies of pure tribal blood.

Vizenor's notion of the *invented indian*:

Vizenor's definition of the Indian Americans and the indigenous culture, as well as of the long perceived representation of the Indians as suppressed beings, matches Womack's definition of the relationship between Tribal Literatures and the American literary canon, where he contends that "tribal Literatures are not some branch waiting to be grafted on to the main trunk, tribal Literatures are the tree, the oldest literatures in the Americas, the most American Literatures" (qtd in Goncalves 8). In a similar comparison, Vizenor believes that the Native Indian is the origin, the very authentic being, and that he is different from all the representations found in literary works. That is why he is unceasingly determined to challenge this notion, because "so many people have grown comfortable with the goals and offerings of the institution" (qtd in Goncalves 45). He maintains that "The *indian* (low-case and italicized) is a simulation, the absence of the natives; the indian transposes the real, and the simulation of the real has no referent, memories, or native stories. The postIndian must waver over aesthetics ruins of (this) *indian* simulations." (Vizenor, 1998, 15) This persona of the '*invented indian*' who finds self-recognition and validation through folktales and oral tradition only, reduces the value of the whole to the value of the part in Vizenor's opinion because "the function of Literature ought to be to continually change and upset, to contradict" (Bowers and Silet 45), not to provide a deformed presentation of the Native. His use of the lowercase form of the word is very ironic, and it definitely does not stand for the race as a whole, but for the mistaken romanticized representation. This makes the main corpus of his work a test of the idea that there is such thing as *indian*, but at the same time the destructive stereotyping of the Euro-American Christopher Columbus, who victimizes

the colonized, is deconstructed into a constructive mixed-blood Native American, and whose heirs are the present natives of the land. In *The Heirs of Columbus*, Vizenor questions Columbus’s racial and religious origins, and at the same time strips him of the privilege of ‘discovery’ since he is already a native returning to the land of origin. The character of Stone Columbus, the protagonist of the novel, claims the existence of healing genes in Columbus’s DNA which he has originally gained from Mayan goddess.

In *Manifest Manners* Vizenor deconstructs the image of the "bone-choker indians", the previously mentioned romanticized notion of 'the noble savage' (1994, 31). His aim here is to counterattack the deconstructive representation of Indian identity, referring to that representation again in an interview with Robert Lee as the “irrelevant *indian* ... simulations of the discoverable other ... an absence, without place”, and asserting “we are all invented as Indians ... and we’re invented from traditional static standards”(LEE). By questioning this representation, Vizenor challenges “all pre-definitions” to use Owens words (Owens 19). Meanwhile, he critiques the symbol of the Native American demise, Christopher Columbus, as a means for the natives’ survival.

Vizenor's Utopia: The Old in the New World

Vizenor's presentation of Columbus as a crossblood liberates all Natives from all racial notions and perceptions and allows for a better reconstruction of the ‘New World’ that would create a perfect utopia where there are “no prisoners in the heart” (*Heirs* 160). It is a utopia that confines to no place or time, and that “can finally escape the mechanistic definition [the linear time] of perfection that has doomed all Western Utopias to become anti-utopia” (*Heirs* 166). The utopia imagined in the novel and interpreted by Stone Columbus exists symbolically, according to Western values, and realistically from the Natives perspective, through the ‘traditional vision of wisdom’. The reconstruction of the Present into a utopia is actualized through the alteration of the past, the history of Columbus and the purity of Columbus’s blood, relating between the Maya that brought civilization to the ‘Old World’ in old times, and “Columbus who escaped the culture of death and carried our genes back to the New World, back to the great river ... he was an adventurer in our blood and he returned to his home land” (*Heirs* 9), as Stone explains to the public audience "on air" in a radio program.

Besides presenting different tribal aspects of the native tradition, Vizenor creates a survival utopia for all the natives and their values and traditions, locating it in the ‘New World’. This healing community relies on the native tradition as much as technological advances. It also facilitates

peaceful co-existence and an intermingling that liberates the natives of all Western interests of victimizing them. Thus, as Louis Owens observes, “mixedbloods and tricksters become metaphors that seek to balance contradiction and shatter static certainties” (225). Tricksters are the most concrete evidence that no category is privileged. They are the most evident disruption of all binaries, dogmas and dichotomies. When Stone Columbus affirms: “Stone is my name.... The stone is my totem, my stories are stones, they are tribal stones.... Stories that hold our tribal words and the past is silence, in the same way that we listen to stories in the blood and hold our past in memories” (*Heirs* 9), he is allowing us to find the connection between his character as a reservoir of tribal stories as much as we are aware that he is a descendent of Columbus. In his blood he carries all the wisdom of the tribal stories, all the history of conquest and the responsibility for everything that happened to his people. It is in Point Anissika, the point of celebrating hybridity and recognition of the other, where the 'other' is recognized as a subject- though different- not as an object. Point Assinika facilitates co-existence and cooperation of all mixedbloods, where the natives “bring all sacred tribal medicine pouches, masks, creatures, ceremonial feathers, bones” (*Heirs* 50), in a clear sign that assimilating in the other’s culture does not mean ignoring one’s own but is more of an involvement act of understanding and containing this ‘other’, by sharing knowledge. Meanwhile, neither Columbus’s official narrative, nor technological advances are denied. On the contrary, it is through the latter that the heirs end racial discrimination and start the validation of the crossblood society, a society that heals the damaging effect of modern, chemical and industrial civilization as shown in Vizenor’s description of this community:

The children who joined that community hobbled and limped, some without legs, others without arms, and many who were blind, but no one seemed to notice, because most of the gamblers in the casino were wounded, deformed, grotesque” (*Heirs* 145)

Thus, in reality it is a place for healing physical deformity, but allegorically, it is a place for identity recovery, not in the common or traditional sense of the word, but through relieving them from their burdens. In this manner, Point Assinika becomes “the ultimate defense of hybridity in the novel, and the trickster heirs emphasize that they want to create a mixedblood America, very different from that of Columbus's” (de Cunha 188), which is highlighted with the inscriptions on the statue of “The Trickster of Liberty”: “heal the tired and huddle masses yearning to breathe free” (*Heirs* 122). Point Assinika is a community where no one is excluded, and where science and technology are used to the utmost to ‘heal’. A place where all humanity becomes one integrated tribe, all of mixedblood and

mixed identities and where racial identification is insignificant. It is a NEW America, where everybody is promised real freedom. It is a “free state with no prisons, no passports, no public schools, no commissionaires, no television, and no public taxation.” (*Heirs* 124)

Cultural Transformation: From *Sanga Pura* to the 'New Natio'

In this respect Vizenor explores all the possibilities of a constructive cultural transformation through the integration between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ worlds. The title of the novel is the best illustration here; it gives equal importance to the natives as that claimed by the Whiteman, and suggests that the Native Americans, as much as the Anglo-Americans have every right to define their identity with reference to their heritage. Identity here is more of a collective notion, a generic term, rather than a personal individualistic one. In his essay "Ratio and Natio in Gerald Vizenor's *The Heirs of Columbus*", Kurpat considers this collective identity as an illustration of relationship between the 'ratio' -the logical and ideological- and the 'natio', where identity is defined with reference to “birth, descent, and blood inheritance” (56). He believes that Vizenor's reference to Columbus as “crossblood who bore the tribal signature of survivance” (*Heirs* 3) shows his concern with the 'natio', yet in a positive sense that opposes the notion of the 'Sangra Pura' (or pure blood) previously explained. Here, Stone Columbus asserts that Christopher Columbus’s achievement was to bring “tribal genes back to the New World ... to his homeland [since he was originally Mayan]” (*Heirs* 9), rather than to discover the New-Found Land. Vizenor’s choice of the Maya tribe is very crucial to the plot according to Kurpat since they “were the first to imagine the universe and to write about their stories in blood” (*Heirs* 26).

The above argument deconstructs the idea that Pure Blood is a Western notion. In *The Heirs of Columbus*, Vizenor transgresses the limitations of pure blood, and bloodline, as well as how mythology is transferred from one generation to the other by blood, which are key concepts for the Native Americans. For him, all those Crossblood, like the Mayans, 'bear their stories in the blood.' Stone Columbus’s reference to the “signature” highlights the genetic signature which would naturally allow him and the rest of the heirs to legitimately claim authority over all what Columbus had, enjoyed, or discovered. He attempts to find a post-tribal, post-racial utopia at Point Assinika, where the citizens, ironically enough, take a statue called “The Trickster of Liberty” as an emblem. At the base of this statue, they bury the remains of Christopher Columbus beside the remains of Pocahontas: the first female native to love and marry a white man. Stone validates the ‘heirs’, confirming that they are “the first nation in the histories that possesses this signature in [their] genes and the wild tricksters of liberties” (*Heirs* 119). They possess, as he claims, the gene that

“would heal”, a healing process achieved only through the stories they “bear in their blood ... stories that heal not steal" (*Heirs* 162) in addition to the advanced therapeutic abilities and new technology, and this defies Kurpat opinion that Vizenor relies on the 'natio', rather than on the rational or logical proof. The utopian Point Assinika celebrates universal identity, and returns to the basic human values, such as dedication, as measures of human worth.

Both Stone as much as Vizenor himself resist "racial identification, and tribal enrollment ... [they] accept anyone who wanted to be tribal, no blood attached or scratched." (*Heirs* 162). The founding of the 'New Natio' takes place to celebrate this universality, destroying all tribal limitations with reference to bloodlines. Furthermore, and as illustrated by Chaine Louis Riel's report, "Scientists (in Assinika) have established the genetic signature of most of the tribes in the country ... anyone could, with an injection of suitable genetic material, prove beyond a doubt a genetic tribal identity" (*Heirs* 162). Once again, we find Vizenor solving contradictions through giving more space to infinite number of interpretations and multiple possibilities. This justifies the open end of the novel where children "danced on the marina, and their wounds were healed once more in a moccasin game with demons" (*Heirs* 183), which corresponds with and relates to the Sartrean aspirations in the epigraph:

We are no longer with those who want to possess the world, but with those who want to change it, and it is to be the very plan of changing it that it reveals the secrets of its being ...

The most beautiful book in the world will not save a child from pain; one does not redeem evil, one fights it; the most beautiful book in the world redeems itself; it also redeems the artist. But not the man. Any more than the man redeems the artist. We want the man and the artist to work their salvation together, we want the work to be at the same time an act; we want it to explicitly conceived as a weapon in the struggle that men wage against evil. –Jean Paul Sartre, "*What is Literature?*" (*Heirs* epigraph)

Vizenor's utopian society realizes Sartre's definition of the role of humanity in the world. It reflects his acceptance of the other as illustrated in quoting from the Western culture. He merges two cultures and more than one genre in his writing. Besides, in Point Assinika it is Man who gives meaning to the world, and he achieves this meaning through unconditional acceptance of the other, no matter who or what that other might be. It is through this integration that the world can reach salvation.

Columbus Advent or The Return of the Native:

In his novel *The Heirs of Columbus*, Gerald Vizenor readdresses the discovery story. At the dawn of the quincentenary of Christopher

Columbus’s discovery of the America’s, and burdened with the official victimizing history, he- like many other native writers- sought freeing himself and coming to terms with his culture as much as with the imposed Western culture because "History as it has been written by Western Europe and the United States, has not, until recently, been recognized as a construct of certain temporal perspective that has been used to validate the existing authority." (Hardin 25). In his novel, Vizenor acknowledges the arrival of Christopher Columbus, yet in a different manner. The long accepted official history is reshaped through the trickster’s version of the ‘story’. In doing so, Vizenor does not refrain from referring to the Western culture, even quoting from it, but this time for highlighting the oral tribal tales. It is through the intertextuality between the two cultures, the intertextuality between the different genres included therein, or even the different histories, that he affirms the impurity and commonness of both. Thus, deconstructing the superiority of either. In *The Heirs of Columbus*, Vizenor, who does not believe that the original Christopher Columbus's story is "a good story", decides to write his own story and to tell the history of the Natives from his own perspective which challenges the victimizing binary opposition: "I don't consider Columbus a good story, and I don't consider it healthy after such a long time to continually tell a bad story that victimizes me" (Vizenor 1990-91, 26). The definition of a 'good story' is very captivating! What is a good story? And from whose point of view would a story be 'good' or 'bad'? Vizenor imposes his own definition of a 'good story', refusing to emphasize the conception related to Columbus as a conqueror or a victorious invader, and stripping him of all the privileged superiority that he has long acquired on the Natives account. Therefore, he starts with devaluating the long-held assumption that all what has been written in that respect is 'true' and decides to weave his own scenario of history. Vizenor does not "free the victimizer from all the responsibilities" when he forgets the past and when he considers all the written history as 'false presentation of the truth, as Hardin maintains (27). He transforms the past into a positive experience that pushes the Native culture forward. The action of forgetting here is not a passive one that reverses the opposition and leaves it as it is, it is more of forgetting the painful experience for the sake of affirming one's own identity without inferiorizing the other. He re-presents the oppressor- in this case the main facilitator of oppression and victimization, Columbus- as a returning native, based on the belief that history is nothing but 'fiction' since it is written by an individual, or some individual, from a personal point of view since "the idea that history is objective is an illusion propagated by those who benefit from it to reinforce their positions as bearers of truth" (Hardin 28). Why then cannot Vizenor write his own version of history as he sees it? In doing so, Vizenor is reshaping the Native American identity: a native has to

neither assimilate all the domineering colonial culture, nor keep lamenting and nostalgically crying over a past that is no more. Both scenarios would again emphasize the authority and superiority of the oppressor. In an interview with Coltelli he says:

I do work into everything I write so called historical events, and I say so-called because some of the historical events would be obtained from either Indian writers or from Indian story-tellers, and other events from non-Indian historians, so that they would be either in the worst example, colonial, and probably the best example would be the methodological historians."
(Coltelli)

Vizenor's awareness that history is "so-called" guides his deconstructive approach to the Euro- American discovery, as well as to Columbus's story. If Christopher Columbus is a native, he can never be an invader. He just "returned". And although his return brings back mishaps, the dissemination of the peaceful tribes, and the death of many natives, it also brings back the tribal 'healing power' that can be traced in his 'genes', the "genetic signature" that transcends death to heal the injured, deformed, or mutilated. Columbus is thus not a victorious European, he is just another evidence of tribal survivance. His achievement is deconstructed, and he is exposed as a mere returnee. This version of the 'story' of discovering America cannot be dismissed as completely 'untrue' in Hardin's point of view, grounded on the fact that all history is fiction. It is more likely that all people tend to accept the official history due to the hegemony of those who wrote it over everyone else. Christopher Columbus is reconstructed once more, but this time the readers perceive the tribal trace for the purpose of moving on with their lives, not for the sake of sticking to a past that has gone. In his point of view, as expressed in an interview with Michael Hardin, moving beyond a humiliating past that brings awe and the feeling of oppression enables the individual to write comic stories about this past, stories that have a healing power, where the story tellers are healers:

My story tellers, my characters, have the power to heal through a good story, through the ecstatic concentration of energy and with special genetic signature which is a shamanic power: they can heal and transform the wounded of this civilization. I have turned around Columbus story to serve the healing rather than victimization; there is much more to be gained from the power of a good story that heals and I think my story heals the victims in a poetic and imaginative way.
(Hardin)

It is significant that Stone Columbus, the story teller, like Vizenor, is a mixedblood who heals and seeks healing. Here, Vizenor is portraying the modern Native Americans celebrating their condition of hybridity, celebrating the mixedblood Christopher Columbus, and thus shattering all the colonial ideals and practices that lead to mere racism. The mixedblood is a transitive state between the tribal and the modern. It is a mixture between the ideal and the material conditions. The characters in this state can move freely between the two cultures and are privileged with the in-between position that enables them to criticize either, or both, unaccused of prejudices or inferiority complex.

This historical displacement reverses, in a Derridean manner², all the oppositions related to Native American identity. Columbus, as presented in the novel, is an 'obscure crossblood' cursed with a physical deformity, who seeks the natives' land in response to a 'call' from the Mayan civilization which he bears to the 'old world'. Hence, the healing gene signature which he bears in his blood. The way Vizenor re-writes Christopher Columbus's story offers a prototype of Native American Identity, more comprehensive than its representation in literature. A prototype that reimagines the past and offers a better vision of the future

His story tellers, the tricksters, are very significant and play an important role. They are more of a contact point or a middle man between Western and tribal cultures. Stone, the contact point of the two worlds in *The Heirs of Columbus*, claims his position and dresses himself as a leader who seeks a utopia and devotes himself to the recovery of history and the healing power of the ancestor, creating a healing society away from the Capitalist community. Vizenor's tricksters are crucial in conveying his ideas. For him the trickster is "reason and meditation, the original translator of tribal encounters.... Tricksters are the translation of creation; the trickster creates the tribe in stories and pronounces the moment of remembrance as the trace of liberation." (Vizenor, 1992, 38). And because they are mixedblood, they are free to dig deep into the society to recover their origin. Stone Columbus digging into the past and the history is a move forward and not a return to that past. He decides to build a new community that is open for all, and that includes all the mixedblood/crossblood.

Conclusion:

The main goal of liberating humanity from the degenerating powers that endeavor to deny full recognition of human prospects is thus achieved. Vizenor's acknowledgement of the crossblood as a reason of blissful celebration takes our understanding of the Native Indian literature and of the mixedblood figure to new horizons. It challenges all the darkness of the racial notions and regenerates the therapeutic tradition of storytelling and

oral literature. *The Heirs of Columbus* in particular illustrates Vizenor's opinion that identity is a choice. This choice defines who we are and what we really want to be/do in life. As has been shown, the novel attempts to eliminate the tension between what we want to be, and the extent to which historical and cultural determinants shape who we are, through subverting history and founding a meeting point. No one is classifiable. Privilege and edge is placed on communal rather than distinctive traits. Acceptance prevails, and Utopia actualizes. This is achieved through his playful use of language which classifies him as a postmodern writer. Vizenor also makes use of all postmodern critical theories like Bhabha's theory of identity and Derrida's theory of deconstruction. Consequently, *The Heirs of Columbus* can be considered as an innovation of the human identity and psyche, adding to the Native American literary canon as much as it adds to the writer himself.

المستخلص:

"الهجينة المباركة" في Vizenor's Utopian Point of Assinika: تفكيك
فكرة "الهندي المخترع" في ورثة كولومبوس.
فاطمة طاهر

شهد الأدب الأمريكي الأصلي المكتوب الذي يعود تاريخه إلى نهاية القرن التاسع عشر "نهضته" في منتصف القرن العشرين ، حيث تناول قضايا الهوية وتحقيق الذات. من بين الشخصيات الأدبية الأكثر شهرة في ذلك الوقت يقف جيرالد فيزينور ، المؤلف والمنظر ، الذي أثرت أعماله الأدبية كلاً من القانون الأمريكي السائد والعرق ، وكانت روايته ورثة كولومبوس (١٩٩١) هي محور هذه الورقة.

في هذه الرواية يعيد Vizenor تخيل تاريخ اكتشاف أمريكا من منظور السكان الأصليين. كتبه بالتزامن مع الذكرى الخمسية لوصول كولومبوس إلى الأرض الجديدة. يقبل المؤلف السجلات التاريخية ويعرض كولومبوس باعتباره سليلًا عائدًا لقبيلة المايا مطبقًا نظريته الخاصة عن "البقاء" و "الهند المخترع" وتفكيك الصور النمطية للمستعمر والسكان الأصليين.

هذه الورقة هي قراءة تحاول تمحيص الرواية في ضوء مفهوم هومي بهابها لـ "الهجين المبارك" ، وكذلك نظريات فيزينور عن "البقاء على قيد الحياة" و "الهندي المخترع" التي يؤكد فيها أن السيادة والتطبيق لا يمكن إلا يحدث من خلال الإدراك والاعتراف بالهجين أو ما يسميه "الدم المختلط" أو "الدم المتقاطع" ليس فقط للسكان الأصليين ، ولكن لجميع البشر. لذلك ، تقدم الرواية الورثة على أنهم نتاج "جديد" للثقافتين الموجودتين لتحدي جميع التمثيلات الغربية السابقة للهنود الأصليين ، وبالتالي تسهيل "بقائهم على قيد الحياة" وتحقيقهم. "الورثة" هنا هم أحفاد كولومبوس الذين لا يطالبون فقط بحقوقهم بوصفهم ورثة ، بل يزعمون أيضًا أن لديهم جينًا علاجيًا في حمضهم النووي ، لأنهم يحملون جين المايا الذي عالج كولومبوس نفسه سابقًا.

Refrence

¹ Gerald Vizenor (1991). *The Heirs of Columbus*. Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, USA. Will hereafter be referred to as *Heirs* followed by page number.

² Although displacement is not theoretically articulated in Derrida's writing, he considers "the deconstruction proceeds by way of displacement, first reversing the terms of a philosophical opposition, that is, reversing a hierarchy or structure of domination, and then displacing or dislodging the system", See (John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, Fordham University Press, New York 1997. Page iii.)

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