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Notes on Contemporary Indian Identity

When I was invited to talk about the position of Native Americans in the twenty-first century “American Patchwork” for the annual seminar held at the Rome Center for American Studies, I immediately thought of the tiny patch occupied by the 565 federally recognized tribes and 100 state recognized tribes that compose approximately 1.6% of the U.S. quilt ¹. I was also wondering, in the aftermath of the great national and international enthusiasm which welcomed the first African American President of the United States, what changes would Barack Black Eagle – from the family who adopted him in May 2008 into the Crow Nation of Montana with the Apsaalooke name “One Who Helps People throughout the Land” – be able to make for the aboriginal inhabitants of the American continent. As I write my contribution to the *RSA Journal*, I can point to at least some of his major achievements: on April 30th 2009 the U.S. Senate passed the Native American Apology Resolution “To acknowledge a long history of official depredations and ill-conceived policies by the Federal Government regarding Indian tribes and offer an apology to all Native Peoples” (S.J.RES.14). President Obama established, starting November 5th 2009, an annual Tribal Nations Conference at the White House; on July 29th 2010 the Department of Justice passed the Tribal Law and Order Act enforcing commitment to fight crimes of violence against Native American women; the Claims Resolution Act, approved December 9th 2010, awarded \$4.6 billion settlement funds to Native American (and African American) land and water rights suits. Last but not least, President Obama has committed the U.S. to sign the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to promote “the Government-to-Government relationship and improve the lives of Indigenous peoples.” ²

On October 29th 2010, upon establishing November as Native American Heritage Month, Obama underlined undisputedly the indigenous right to American land and to cultural difference:

For millennia before Europeans settled in North America, the indigenous peoples of this continent flourished with vibrant cultures and were the original stewards of the land. From generation to generation, they handed down invaluable cultural knowledge and rich traditions, which continue to thrive in Native American communities across our country today. During National Native American Heritage Month, we honor and celebrate their importance to our great Nation and our world.

Obama's words gain meaning if we compare them to Ronald Reagan's speech of November 1987 when he established American Indian Week, significantly in coincidence with Thanksgiving celebration. The overdue official recognition of the Native American help during first settlement and during WW II also resonated with the image of the Indians as "Noble Savages" and benevolent helpers of the colonizers. Branded in the American imagination since early colonization and carried on during the expansion of the empire through the figures of Pocahontas, Squanto, Longfellow's invented Hiawatha, Cooper's Chingachgook, this image seemed fit to include as logical continuation the twentieth century World War heroes, notably Iwo Jima hero Pima Ira Hayes and the Navajo and Choctaw code-talkers. In Reagan's speech, the recognition of the first inhabitants' role, their valor in wartime, and their arts was also a means of silencing dispossession: "We do well to set aside the week in which Thanksgiving falls to honor the achievements of American Indians, the first inhabitants of the lands that now constitute the continental United States" said President Reagan,

Native Americans' assistance made a significant difference for early settlers. Since then, American Indians have continued to make valuable contributions to our country. They have served with valor and distinction in wartime, and their artistic, entrepreneurial, and other skills have truly enriched our national heritage.

Currently a number of Native Americans and remarkably Native American women work in the administration: Cherokee Kimberly Teehee is Barack Obama's Native American policy advisor, Standing Rock Sioux Jodi Gillette creates connections to the tribal governments, and the Pawnee Larry Echo Hawk is Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs at the Department of Interior. Although tribal leaders fear, understandably, that Obama's plans

will not last beyond his administration, they have a generally positive outlook on the actions of the President who in his inaugural speech re-asserted the right of the People to “constitutional principles of liberty and equality” (Pease 117). After the second White House Tribal Nations Conference, Jacqueline Johnson Pata, executive director of the National Congress of American Indians, declared to the *Washington Post*: “Last year was stellar . . . we’ve had the support and the engagement of being able to have true dialogue with the administration” (Thompson).

A critical issue in Native American studies, the issue of Indian identity can be contextualized by looking at the U.S. census, which since the year 2000 answers to the need of recognition of mixed-descent, allowing people to define themselves as belonging to “two or more races.” This partly seems to answer David Hollinger’s call in his “Postscript 2000” to *Postethnic America*, that the American democracy needed to take into account the reality of discrimination based on an aggressive color hierarchy (180) and his suggestion that identity is best defined when linked to affiliation (189), giving people the opportunity of a “revocable consent” to support “the renewal and critical revision of those communities of descent whose progeny choose to devote their energies to these communities even after experiencing opportunities for affiliating with other kinds of people” (13, 118, 197). That people do change their affiliation is shown by the loose boundaries between groups, notably by the very high rate of young people (ages 25 to 34) who – according to the 1990 census originally examined by Hollinger – marry into different “descent communities,” a change which has been remarkably noticeable in the past thirty years or so (207). In 1990 60% of Indians were married to non-Indians (205); moreover, as Hollinger remarks, Native Americans were the only group in the ethno-racial pentagon which had seen an increased passage from one group to another. Sociologist Eva Marie Garrouette has pointed out that the 100% increase of the American Indian population in the 2000 census has made demographers argue that this is “probably not the result of an increase in birthrates or a decline in death rates, but rather the result of individuals who once identified themselves as white, black, or Hispanic changing their reported identity to American Indian” (164 n 12). This is not a new phenomenon for we know that a number of people of mixed descent chose to identify as Indians during the period of the Red Power movement⁴ and the

literature of the Native American Renaissance. One needs therefore to enquire into the very complex issues of self-definitions and definitions of Indian identities within Native communities besides considering the negotiations involved in being identified as Indian in American society.

MEN AND WOMEN MADE OF WORDS

We are all familiar with the long discussion centering on the term Indian by Native American writers. An influential and famous statement that immediately comes to mind is “An Indian is an image that a given man has of himself” (“The Man Made of Words”) by Kiowa/Scottish/Cherokee writer N. Scott Momaday, whose mother chose to identify (“she imagined who she was”) with her Cherokee great-grandmother, while he was raised in a multicultural context, exposed to Anglo-American, Navajo, Jemez, and Kiowa cultures and chose to identify as Kiowa following his father’s heritage (*The Names* 23-25). Stimulated by Momaday’s image of the Indian writer as a “man made of words,” Gerald Vizenor (Métis, Anishinaabe, and French Canadian) has been engaged in the redefinition of Indian identity and in a long discussion of the “*invented* Indian,” (italics mine) arguing in a now famous interview “I believe we’re all invented as Indians” (Bowers and Silet). The word Indian, he explained, “has rendered extinct thousands of individual and distinct tribal cultures” (*Earthdivers* xxi). In the Preface to the 1999 edition of his *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*, Vizenor claims back American literature to “Native American Indians,”

the originary storiers of this continent ... The simulation of the *Indian* is the absence of real natives – the contrivance of the other in the course of dominance. Truly, natives are the storiers of an imagic presence, and *Indians* are the actual absence – the simulation of the tragic primitive. (vii)

Euro-American scholar Eric Cheyfitz in *The Poetics of Imperialism* has made a masterful enquiry into the acts of appropriation inherent in this invention, or “imperial translation,” as the title of his book explains, *From the Tempest to Tarzan*:

European translation of the indigenous peoples of the Americas displaced or attempted to displace ... Native Americans into the realm of the proper ... not so these Americans could possess the proper but so that having been translated into it they could be dispossessed of it ... and relegated to the territory of the figurative. (59)

Genetics has proved that race distinctions are scientifically inconsistent, and anthropology has shown that “There are no ‘pure’ identities as there are no ‘pure races or cultures’” (Krupat *Red Matters* 109), but the concepts of breed and of blood lineage inherent in that of race are still central and controversial issues in the discourse of descent, inclusion and exclusion, both outside and inside Native communities. The expression “full-blood” is still in use today to define persons of solely Native American ancestry, as are the terms “breed,” “mixedblood,” “crossblood” and “hybrid.” Native American literature has foregrounded these terms and the issues they deploy. Through the early 1980s, novels and poems have voiced the painful search for identity of mixed blood characters, but this quest has later been transformed into an acceptance of liminality, hybridity, or interstitiality seen as positive and empowering positions. Among Native American writers foregrounding a new vision of mixed ancestry that first come to mind is Wendy Rose, of Anglo German, Miwok, and Hopi descent. Rose has transformed her dramatic position of half-breed (*The Halfbreed Chronicles* 1985) into an empowering and cosmopolitan position which embraces all indigenous people and all victims of imperialism and discrimination. As she stated as early as 1972 in her poem “The Long Root:” “and no matter how I try / There is no way to shake / Cambodia from my Wounded Knee” (*Bone Dance* 4). Through her poetry she has unraveled her problems of kinship and biological descent in recurring images of blood, bones, earth, and stone, overcoming the biological issue through travels and seeing different people, gaining a postcolonial position and feeling linked, as she stated in her introduction to *Bone Dance*:

to related concerns on a global level ... In exploring what it means to be a ‘halfbreed,’ I learned that this is not a condition of genetics and has nothing to do with ancestry or race. Instead, ‘halfbreedness’ is a condition of history, a result of experience, of dislocations and reunions, and of choices made for better or worse. I began to study the lives of individuals who, for reasons I didn’t know,

profoundly affected me. All were victims of their place in history in some way. All were colonized souls. (xvi)

Her latest collection of poems, *Itch Like Crazy*, shows how the conflicted issue of her “multiracial” identity and of her Hopi heritage⁵ is now a balanced acceptance of her patchwork identity, “a blanket made of all these different threads,” as she stated in a recent interview (Godfrey).

Gerald Vizenor has famously engaged the blood issue exploring the position of “tribal mixedblood” and cross-blood foregrounding it in the title of his books (*Crossbloods: Bone Courts, Bingo, and Other Reports* 1990, *Landfill Meditation: Crossblood Stories* 1991). The late Louis Owens (Choctaw, Cherokee, Irish) inscribed *Other Destinies*, his masterful analysis of Native American novels, as subversive postcolonial mimicry, “For mixedbloods, the next generation.” He provocatively stated his position in regard to biological descent and legal affiliation as “Not a real, essential Indian because I’m not enrolled and did not grow up on a reservation. Because growing up in different times I naively thought that Indians was something we were, not something we did, or were required to prove on demand.” (Owens, *Mixedblood Messages* 176). He posed his autobiographical essays and criticism as *Mixedblood Messages*, and in “As If an Indian Were Really an Indian” elaborated a diaspora identity born from his “complex roots and histories” and migrant life.

Louise Erdrich, of mixed German, French, and Anishinaabe ancestry, and her late mixed Miwok husband Michael Dorris, have often voiced in their novels the conflicted position of mixed-bloods and their “strange feeling” of “dual citizenship” (Owens, *Other Destinies* 194). In *The Crown of Columbus*, a timely novel playing with the Western narrative of expansion, the issues of definition and self-definition are voiced poetically through the character of Vivian:

There are advantages at not being this or that. You have a million stories, one for every occasion, and in a way they’re all lies, and in another way they’re all true ... There are times when I control who I’ll be, and times when other people decide. I’m not all of anything, but I’m a little bit of a lot. My roots spread in every direction, and if I water one set of them more often than others, it’s because they need it more ‘Caught between two worlds’ is the way it’s often put in clichéd prose, but I’d put it differently. We are the catch. (167)

The mixedbreed is the trope through which Gerald Vizenor has subverted the hegemonic fictions of colonization in *The Heirs of Columbus* (1991). In this defacement of the discovery, Vizenor turns Columbus himself into a Jewish Maya half-breed and makes his descendants, the Anishinaabe “Reservation mongrels,” the authority on a New World history of hybridity. His “benevolent trickster” position allows for inclusion of Jewish expulsion from Spain in this subversive counter-celebration of 1492. Vizenor challenges the Euro-American discourse of modernity foregrounding the discussion of a “postindian” position (*Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* 1993), a definition that “absolves by irony the nominal simulations of the *indian*, waives centuries of translation and dominance, and resumes the ontic significance of native modernity” (viii). His complex discussion on Native American identity and bloodlines poses identity as performance, in which he identifies not seven types of ambiguities, but “eight native theaters for the performance of identity ... victimry, concession, ... creation, ... countenance, ... genealogies, documentation, situations, and trickster stories” (*Fugitive Poses* 88-94), in which natives “are cast as representations ... the absolute victims of modernity” (Lyons 97). Vizenor’s trickster trope, or “comic holotrope” (*Narrative chance* 187), opens a discourse against essentialism and “terminal creeds” and is part of a subversive postcolonial Native American canon of itself which confuses identity issues. Identity play through the trickster trope is also in the visual artists’ discourse. Names that first come to mind here are those of Larry Fonseca and Jaune Quick-To-See Smith⁶. The trickster post-indian position is a frontier space “unstable, multidirectional, hybridized,” (Owens *Mixedblood* 26), it crosses the boundaries of tribal cultures and Euro American history, poses Native identity as based on performance and explores cosmopolitanism.

“REAL INDIANS”

Understandably, the question Who is an Indian? is a critical and complex issue in Indian country, involving historical, social, cultural aspects and personal agency, as Krupat first remarked (*Red Matters* 2). Indians, Native Americans, First Nations, Aboriginal people, Indigenous people are currently and

interchangeably used self-definitions in opposition to Euro Americans, while tribal names voice in the aboriginal languages the many identities and the great variety of peoples/nations. To briefly summarize the political discussion on the use of those different terms, “First Nations” is more commonly used in Canada and points to inherent sovereign status; “Native American” is generally accepted as politically correct and it includes Native people from Hawai’i; “Aboriginal” (lat. *ab origine*) points to being “here first” on the American continent, since native can be said of any person born in the U.S. Besides speaking of being native and aboriginal, the word “Indigenous” opens to pan American identification and to sharing issues with colonized people worldwide. The United Nations’ recognition of the rights of Indigenous people has been, as mentioned earlier, a critical point in Barack Obama’s agenda.

To get a closer insight into the politics of identity issue we must contextualize the issue in the social and political reality of Indian country, which is under a “domestic colonialism” (Krupat *Turn* 30) or “paracolonialism” (Vizenor “Ruins” 7),⁷ where tribal rolls themselves are a colonial imposition and the U.S. government still has legal ownership of reservation land, kept “in trust” for the tribes which “still remain under ... the colonial agenda of federal Indian law. ... Alaska natives and tribally enrolled Indians find themselves negotiating in their daily lives a complex dialectic of the colonial and the postcolonial” (Cheyfitz, 2006 5). Today biological descent is required by two thirds of the federally recognized tribes, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs provides detailed blood quantum charts,⁸ but this is far from being an easy solution to issues of inclusion and exclusion. As we know, historically Native Americans have resisted colonization through traditional strategies used in intertribal contacts, such as warfare and inclusion. Examples that immediately come to mind are the early assimilationist position of the Southeastern tribes that ended disastrously with the Five Civilized Tribes (Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, Seminole) marching to near destruction on the Trail of Tears, or the practice of adoption of French *voyageurs* by the Eastern Woodlands tribes during the Fur Trade. Whether due to intertribal exchange and adoption or colonization and mixed unions with Europeans, Mexicans, or Black people, Native American identities in the last couple of centuries – with the obvious exception of the more compact or isolated communities – have been mixed. The mixed-blood position discussed by Vizenor, Owens, and many others

seems fit then to represent a relevant aspect of contemporary Native identities. In the ongoing discussion of Indian 'authenticity,' nationalist positions counter Vizenor and Owens' "trickster hermeneutics" which seem too open to the Euro American discourse and cosmopolitanism. The nationalist position of Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Craig Womack, Robert Warrior, and Jace Weaver among others advocates indigenous intellectual sovereignty asking for the re-appropriation of critical discourse on Native America.⁹

Among the Native voices engaged in the discussion, Eva Marie Garrouette and Scott Richard Lyons have offered interesting work grounded on new indigenist perspectives. Eva Marie Garrouette, a sociologist at Boston College, states her position as "a light-skinned, mixed-race person ... a legal citizen of an American Indian tribe since childhood, one who found her way back, in adulthood, to the Cherokee Nation that her father was born in, grew up in, and left" (xi). Her inquiry into definitions of "real Indians" as based on law, biology, culture, and self-definitions combines sociological and cultural analysis with a "Radical indigenist" position. One of the critical issues engaged in her work is that both the U.S. Government and Indian nations adjust their rules of racial classification according to the needs of different historical moments. Among the complexities of legal affiliations, she foregrounds the many "irreconcilables" who refused enrollment to avoid allotment (21), cases of arbitrary assignments of blood quantum on tribal rolls (52-53), problematic cases of Indian persons who are tribally mixed and must officially be enrolled in one tribe only, people of Indian ancestry but not included in legal definitions, and persons of long standing tribal affiliations which may not offer a guarantee of "real" Indian identity. A well-known instance of the latter is nineteenth-century inclusion in the tribal rolls obtained by whites forging Indian descent and bribing census data collectors in order to claim Indian land allotment. Thousands of Oklahoma homesteaders were known as "five-dollar Indians" (24). Another peculiar case is that of "freedmen," former slaves of Oklahoma tribes, with no Indian ancestry, officially made into tribal citizens after the Civil War (24). And there were (and are) of course many descendants of cross unions with Blacks among Creek and Seminole (77). Today Black Indians are fully admitted into Cherokee tribes only if they can prove that they had one ancestor in the tribal roll in 1906 (Lyons 47). From uneasiness with the limitations found in definitions of identity used in tribal

and legal practice, Garrouette shifts to cultural definitions. Interviews with tribal elders seem to point to performative definitions: an Indian is someone “who walks in that way and sees the world in that way” (Julie, Cherokee 73), someone who feels a deep relationship to the land (Gregory Cajete, Tewa 74), or speaks the tribal language in which ceremonies are performed (Billy E., Eastern Delaware 75). The conclusion she comes to is still unsatisfactory: cultural definitions show agreement on some “distinctive ways of being in the world. Yet this is a position that easily edges over into an unrealistic demand that authentic Indian lifeways must embody the farthest, most exotic extremes of otherness.” (81) To counter this demand, she offers the extreme example of the Mashpee of Cape Cod, who suffered heavy acculturation since the Puritans’ times, whose collective tribal identity was challenged in a 1976 trial after they tried to claim land. James Clifford’s conclusion after witnessing the trial, that “all the critical elements of identity are in specific conditions replaceable: language, land, blood, leadership, religion” and that recognized, viable tribes exist in which “any one or even most of these elements are missing, replaced, or largely transformed” challenges the whole concept of culture (81). A new possibility for discussion may come from what Garrouette identifies as a “Radical (i.e. root) Indigenist” position stemming from Gramsci and Appiah. This position considers Native American ways of knowledge as leading to a positive indigenous essentialism, distinct from the biased, colonially-imposed essentialism and “argues for the reassertion and rebuilding of traditional knowledge from its roots, its fundamental principles.” (102) From this position Garrouette proposes

a definition of identity that is available within many knowledge traditions is a definition of *kinship*. ... [and] responds to at least two themes that one encounters across a range of tribal philosophies. One of these reflects a condition of *being* which I call *relationship to ancestry*. The second involves a condition of *doing*, which I call *responsibility to reciprocity*. (118)

To support this essentialist claim, she evidences that many tribal stories pose kinship as not limited to human beings, in which persons “find their identity, within a kinship network that includes not only other humans but also animals, plants, minerals, geographic features, the earth itself, celestial bodies, and spirit beings” (132). In this mixed kinship network, offspring

may choose to change their affiliation (i.e. to humans or animals) while clan marriage rules show how an Indian identity survives intermarriages for hundreds of generations, a model of how tribes and individuals negotiate their identities. Aware of the difficulties of combining Western and indigenous ways of thinking Garroutte is very cautious in stating her discourse as a possibility, not as an imposition.

Scott Richard Lyons, who teaches Native American and American Literature at Syracuse University positions himself in the discussion as Ojibwe/Lakota, raised in Leech Lake Ojibwe Reservation in northern Minnesota, where “difficulties of Indian life are complicated by the shade and color of your skin, which in my case is fairly light. Sometimes during my youth I would speak as an Indian and in response be called a White Boy. Other times I would speak as a White Boy and be quickly reminded of my Indianness.” (ix) A position that his daughter today identifies as “multiracial,”(36) and that speaks of historical migrations from coastal Canada, of mixed marriages, and seems engraved in the language, *Ojibwemowin* (83-89). In his study Lyons shifts the postcolonial discourse of dominance to an exhaustive discussion of what choices have been possible for Native people under colonial domination. The x-marks signed by Indians under treaties, considered as symbols of defeat, become, in his act of postcolonial subversion, a trope through which Native positions may be re-defined:

The x-mark is a contaminated and coerced sign of consent made under conditions that are not of one's making. It signifies power and a lack of power, agency and a lack of agency. It is a decision one makes when something has already been decided for you, but it is still a decision. ... I use the x-mark to symbolize Native assent to things (concepts, policies, technologies, ideas) that, while not necessarily traditional in origin, can sometimes turn out all right and occasionally even good. (2-3)

The question that he asks through a brilliant and thorough survey of contemporary Native debates on identity, culture, traditionalism, nationalism, and tribalism is whether it is “possible today to envision the survival of indigenous identity, culture, and nationalization in a nonessentialistic manner.” (34) Lyons' long chapter on “Identity Crisis” opens the discussion with famous cases of appropriation of Indian identities in the first part of

the 20th century¹⁰ and issues of “authentic” Indianness raised by Native professors in the 1990s defending their university jobs from ‘infiltrations’ by non-Indians and of Indian artists protesting imitation “authentic” Indian art. These brought legal definitions of “ethnic frauds” and political acts – like the Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990 – which had the side effect of making Native people more self-conscious about blood quantum and tribal enrollment (41-42). The modern “identity crisis” in Indian country unfolds as a very real, social, political, and cultural issue involving rights (citizenship, land, jobs, religion, birthrights), recognition, racial identification (black Indian, white Indian), and the recovery of traditions (language, culture, worldviews) (50). Therefore Lyons proposes that the aim of investigators should be to develop definitions of identity “that would keep ‘Indians’ viable for at least seven generations, strengthen existing communities, enhance our political independence, and provide the greatest degree of happiness for the greatest number of Indians (whatever those things turn out to be).” (50) He interrogates in detail issues of tribal enrollment, lineage, language, blood, phenotype and culture, dismantling the idea of the existence of any universally approved notion of Indianness: “Indian identities are constructed ... they do not come from biology, soil, or the whims of a Great Spirit, but from discourse, action, and history; ... this thing is not so much a thing at all, but rather a social process. Indian identity is something that people do, not what they are” (Lyons 40). Entering in conversation with Garroutte’s proposal of a “radical indigenist” position, Lyons appreciates her attempt at developing a theory of identity “that not only privileges traditionalism but also values inclusiveness and change” (51), but insists that a definition based on kinship and performance according to community expectations cannot be applied to all societies and might exacerbate conflicts. Investigating Ojibwe traditions, language and culture in which he was raised, he does not find a word nor concept for “kinship” (which he traces back to L.H. Morgan), while the idea of a performative identity seems to prevail: a person was considered an Ojibwe, as Vizenor reported “if he lived with them and adopted their habits and mode of life.”¹¹ In his research interviews with tribal elders, Lyons finds that when mixed unions produced “a third, straddling class of identity – the métis or mixed-blood” (51) it was not blood but cultural lifestyle marks like hairstyle, dress, music, houses, food, that determined if a

person was considered Indian: “you are how you eat” (53). The word mixed-blood in *Ojibwemowin* is *Wiisaakodewiniwag* or “diluted men” (53) meaning diluted Indianness for person of mixed cultures; its Lakota equivalent is “speaks white,” foregrounding the notion that “what was diluted was not blood, but culture,” (54) so that “You are what you speak ... is a political statement,” (Lyons 54) not a biological statement. Traditional Ojibwe ideas of themselves “always had the potential to change and incorporate new ideas, and even incorporate new people” (57). Alain Touraine’s model of three types of political identity in contemporary world is adopted by Lyons: “legitimizing identity” (as defined and imposed by BIA, used by federally recognized tribal governments, stereotyped in schoolbooks or Hollywood movies (60-61), “resistance identity” “generated by those actors in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination” like the community actions of the Red Power (60, 63-64) and “project identity” “when social actors, on the basis of whatever cultural materials are available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, by so doing, seek the transformation of the overall social structure” (61,64-66), as in the case of the indigenist project of Subcomandante Marcos in Chiapas. The “resistance identity” has had an important transformative role, bringing urban Indians back to Reservations to create community renewals in fields such as education, health, religion, and language revitalization. This tripartite model shows its usefulness to Lyons for

the recognition that Indian identity is never static or singular but always dynamic and multiple. Another is the possibility of rapid transformation from one identity to another. ... A third implication is that there is a dialectic between political desire and Indian identity, the one influencing the other in a relationship that is rarely if ever mutually inclusive. (65-66)

It is a useful model that allows to see identity as construction rather than as something “that supposedly ‘is’ and by implication must always be.” (66) To round up his complex discussion and to go back to the word “Indian” from which we started, Lyons points out that it was not exclusively a white invention. Reading Roger Williams’ *A Key into the Languages of America*, he finds that Native people would ask Williams why they were called Indians and how “understanding the reason, they will call themselves Indians, in

opposition to English etc.” (Lyons 69). This allows him to remind us that “it was never a stable signifier and Indians played a role in its making. I’d call it an x-mark” (69). A playfully bitter support of this statement may be found in Spokane/Coeur d’Alène Sherman Alexie’s claim of the word Indian: “The word belongs to us now. We are Indians. That has nothing to do with Indians from India. We are not American Indians. We are Indians, pronounced In-din. It belongs to us. We own it and we are not going to give it back” (4).

Notes

¹ American Community Survey Report 2004, Office of Minority Health Report, 2008.

² As this essay goes into print in January, 2011, the U.S. is officially supporting the United Nations Declaration <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/153223.pdf>.

³ Sociologist Garrouette has pointed out how the Census recognition of a multiracial option opens the way to bureaucratic challenges addressing particular civil rights, such as job and scholarship opportunities regulated by minority affiliation (15).

⁴ See Nagel.

⁵ Her father was probably famous Oraibi artist, Charles Loloma.

⁶ Allan Ryan has investigated this issue with special attention to Canada First Nations artists in *The Trickster Shift*. See also Tiina Wiikström.

⁷ Vizenor speaks of “paracolonial history” in “The Ruins of Representation,” 7.

⁸ See Garrouette, 44-45, Table 1, for the detailed chart for calculating the Quantum of Indian Blood issued by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Tribal Enrollment, app. H.

⁹ See Lynn; Womack; Weaver; Warrior. See also Weaver, Womack, and Warrior. Krupat has discussed nationalism in *Red Matters* insisting that cosmopolitan positions in criticism must enter into conversation with nationalist and indigenist positions to avoid “a second erasure of Native agency” (23).

¹⁰ Famous cases are Grey Owl, Forrest Carter, Long Lance, a less known Italian case, that of Tewanna Rey, aka White Elk or Cervo Bianco, is discussed in my “Contatti culturali tra Italia e America Indiana: la via delle maschere.”

¹¹ G. Vizenor, *The People Named the Chippewa*, in Lyons 51.

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