

Postcolonial Nativeness: Nomadism, Cultural Memory, and the Politics of Identity in Louise Erdrich's and Michael Dorris's "The Crown of Columbus"

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I belong to the lost tribe of mixed bloods, that hodgepodge amalgam of hue and cry that defies easy placement.

LOUISE ERDRICH AND MICHAEL DORRIS, *The Crown of Columbus*

IN AN INTERVIEW with Joseph Bruchac, Louise Erdrich reflects on the "dual citizenship" that afflicts the formation of the mixed-blood subject yet is nonetheless conducive to comfortable pleasures: "When you live in the mainstream and you know that *you're not quite, not really there*, you listen for a voice to direct you. I think, besides that, you also are a member of another nation" (77). In this initial mapping of (dis)location, Erdrich evidently inhabits a space of marginalization where she is codified as absent or totally invisible. However, this displacement soon disappears, to be superseded by the uneasy epiphany that a mixed blood is capable after all of incorporating the two worlds comfortably: "It's kind of incomprehensible that there's this ability to take in non-Native culture and be comfortable in both worlds" (79). Yet, contrary to this desire to suture the fissures between the white and Native worlds in order to constitute a coherent, stable identity, Louise Erdrich's and Michael Dorris's *The Crown of Columbus* articulates a paradoxical and disruptive subjectivity, the production of which requires endless investments, transformations, and negotiations of incommensurable desires and alliances. In this comic thriller, Erdrich and Dorris interrogate some distinctively postmodern aporias, such as identity, authenticity, and multiple subjectivity; and humour, irony, and parody accrue to offer a serious postcolonial engagement with the allegedly monolithic

imperial politics of identity that still informs the racial economy between whites and Native Americans.¹

In a recent article on the postcolonial trajectory of Native American literature, Arnold Krupat argues that Native American authors attempt to dismantle the imperial logic of the master's language by inflecting English with the Native American oral tradition. Based on the problematic definition of postcoloniality in *The Empire Writes Back*, by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, Krupat's appropriation of postcoloniality as a geometrical matrix of centre/margin presents Native literature as exclusively "anti-imperial translation," which operates to "foreground the tension and emphasize the differences between Indian and English" (173). Unfortunately, Krupat collapses the vital distinction between postcolonialism and anti-colonialism, a necessary distinction in postcolonial studies that prevents postcolonialism from merely perpetuating the logic of essential identities and simplistically reversing the racial currency of imperial politics. In this article, I would like to consider how Erdrich and Dorris investigate the dominant politics of identity in their attempts not only to abrogate all forms of essential, unified identities and dissolve the binary logic that generates them but also to celebrate difference, multiplicity, contingent identities, and the subject's constant and complex negotiations of belonging to various, even antagonistic, collectivities. Erdrich and Dorris replace the hegemonic fiction of the authentic, reservation-bound Native with the middle-class, urban, and academic mixed blood, Vivian Twostar. In fact, this ambitious, single-parent mixed blood identifies with the seductive semantics of colonial expropriation and possession more than she romanticizes her kinship with the indigenous population of the Americas. Moreover, the authors substitute for the superior, masculinist, white male the character of Roger Williams, a man who becomes a comic and cultural hybrid, despite his membership in the Bostonian elite. The unsuspecting, self-assured Williams is defamiliarized and alienated from himself by his unconscious incorporation of elements from Native American myth into the texture of his own allegedly unified and pure identity. Actually, in this comic thriller, humour and mockery are played mostly against Williams's own insecurity,

anti-heroic masculinity, and absurd fantasies. And last, Erdrich and Dorris represent the notorious icon of Western imperialism and capitalism, Christopher Columbus, as a complicated and, ironically, dispossessed subject.

Through these complex and contradictory representations of Vivian Twostar, Roger Williams, and Christopher Columbus, Erdrich and Dorris engage in the construction of multiple subjectivities, which are formed at the intersection of various conflicting social determinants. My intention here, nevertheless, is to unravel the ceaselessly non-localizable and transformative structure of Vivian's unique subjectivity, which will be referred to as "postcolonial Nativeness." As a model of multiple subjectivity, postcolonial Nativeness is displaced across multiple, shifting, and contradictory matrices of (dis)identification, for postcolonial Nativeness is predicated on a conception of difference not only as a distinction from others but also as a relation to itself. This supposition of postcolonial Nativeness, in accounting for such a complicated and inclusive subjectivity, laden with ambiguities and politicized paradoxes, carries with it some productive affinities with Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's seminal works on the rhizome and nomadism.² In fact, nomadism, or the practice of dislocation, proves to be appropriate and effective in discussing *The Crown of Columbus*, for the authors'/ narrators'/ protagonists' narratives are structured by constant mobility and displacement. In "Where I Ought to Be: A Writer's Sense of Place," for example, Erdrich discusses the impact of postmodern spaces on the production of dislocated, or nomadic, subjectivities:

Besides, in our society mobility is characteristic of our experience. Most of us don't grow up in a single community anymore, and even if we do, we usually leave it. How many of us live around the corner from parents, grandparents, even brothers and sisters? How many of us come to know a place intimately over generations? How many places even exist that long? We are part of a societal ebb and flow, a people washing in and out of suburbs and cities. We move with unparalleled ease, assisted by Mayflower Van Lines and superhighways. We are *nomadic*, both by choice, relocating in surroundings that please us, and more often by necessity. (487-88)

Mapping spatial dislocations in the production of postcolonial Nativeness, however, is not the only trajectory of nomadism.

In fact, nomadism is interiorized to interweave a multiple subjectivity, which is displaced across various paradoxical axes of difference.

Postcolonial Nativeness converges with nomadic thought in being a transversal flow based on the dynamic principles of connection, heterogeneity, multiplicity, and cartography. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari describe nomadism as an infinite openness, which circulates, accumulates, and affirms horizontal multiplicities and heterogeneities that can connect to any other point in the open and smooth (borderless) space of the rhizome (21). Although these differential heterogeneities share equal ontological status, nomadology resists retrieving a primeval mythic origin of sameness. Hence, nomadism is likely to function “more by breaks, transitions, migration, and accumulation than by combining units” (118). The nomadic process operates through the logic of the “and . . . and . . . and . . .” (25), which endlessly experiments with connecting, conjugating, and continuing multiplicities without erasing the differences of its divergent constituents. However, nomadic logic should not be interpreted as the mathematical law of addition but as that of subtracting. Nomadism is a multiplicity, from which “the One is always subtracted ($n - 1$)” (21). That is, a multiplicity is formed when the transcendental, unified, and coherent Subject of phallogocentrism is negated and erased to allow for the production of multiple subject positions. To the extent that multiplicities are recombined in a constant transformative process of communication, the production of a nomadic subject compares to what Deleuze and Guattari refer to in *Anti-Oedipus* as the “either . . . or . . . or” logic of disjunctive synthesis (69-70, 76). This anoedipal recording is “fully affirmative, nonrestrictive, inclusive” (76); it never collapses heterogeneities and differences into the self-same but “affirms their distance as that which relates the two as different” (77). As such, the differential terms are paradoxically affirmed “throughout their entire distance, *without restricting one by the other or excluding the other from the one*” (76). Rather than rendering Otherness antagonistic to sameness, nomadism postulates a constant slippage and recognition of the self into/in the Other and of Otherness into/in sameness, as it

preserves their differences in their entirety. To repeat, postcolonial Nativeness shares with nomadism a propensity for dislocation, for the collapsing of any fixed centre that may block the processes of becoming, connection, multiplicity, and difference. In Rosi Braidotti's words, a nomadic subject "expresses the desire for an identity made of transitions, successive shifts, and coordinated changes, without and against an essential unity" (22).

This infinite openness of nomadism and its insistence upon de-investing cultural memory of its symbolic valuation undermines all processes antagonistic to becoming, such as "genealogy," "memory," and "reterritorialization" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Plateaus* 11, 16, 381). This de-investment does not, however, entrap postcolonial Nativeness in the apolitical universalism of liberal humanism, for postcolonial Nativeness does not and will not revert to an elusive, uncommitted political practice, nor does it fail to acknowledge its complicity with dominant power structures. This can be explained by the endeavours of postcolonial Nativeness, as practised by Erdrich and Dorris, to reinsert the inherent "tree or root structures in rhizomes" (15) back into nomadism without refraining from problematizing this reappropriation of cultural memory and sacred tribal geography. Postcolonial Nativeness redeems the evasion of cultural specificities in nomadism by reinscribing political attachments to tribal land, to cultural memory such as myth and the oral tradition of chants, and to revisionist historiography that retrieves the suppressed voices of the vanquished natives. Yet Erdrich and Dorris continue to de-sediment this repossessive return to tribe, memory, and geography, by exceeding the fantasy of home and overturning the positionality of the Native from that of an exploited victim to a colonizer.

Postcolonial Nativeness, as I propose it, evokes a nomadic model of multiple subjectivity and an aesthetics of dislocation, which are predicated on the transversal movement of three intertwined discursive practices. The first is the postcolonial imperative, which celebrates an inclusive, affirmative, and accumulative identity; here, multiple subjectivity is constructed in the mixed blood's attempts to subvert the Self/Other binary polarization as well as to establish transcultural connections. The

second discursive movement maps the temporary return of the anti-colonial impetus, which dictates reversing the systemic expropriation of the natives' lands, rewriting history, and reclaiming the Native American cultural memory. Nevertheless, the production of this multiple subjectivity requires, in the third discursive movement, a further dislocation from fantasies of belonging to a homogenized community of the oppressed, for it is obligatory for such a subjectivity to exceed any sedimentation of effect for mythic homes. In short, postcolonial Nativeness engages in negotiating and investing in several aparallel continuities of the local and the global and the anti-colonial and the postcolonial in the context of multiplicity, continuous becoming, and transformation.

Corresponding with Deleuze's and Guattari's nomadic production of identity, Erdrich's and Dorris's construction of Vivian Twostar in *The Crown of Columbus* is that of a postcolonial Native subjectivity which deploys and inclusively affirms ontologically equal heterogeneities without naturalizing their differential otherness. Vivian engages in an incessant investment in her cultural multiplicities, which she initially marks along the despotic ("State") structures of dualism and assimilation: her heritage is a "mixed bag of New and Old Worlds" (13). This particular movement corresponds to the nomadic "assignifying rupture," in the sense of subjecting traditional identitarian logic to "disruptions and fissures" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Plateaus* 9). Consequently, this initial formulation of subjectivity along Manichean lines cannot be interpreted as an abandonment of nomadology, for Vivian soon escapes and moves beyond the dominant codes of State, maps a new line of flight, and realigns her identity according to the principles of heterogeneity and multiplicity. Thus, she re-presents herself along multiracial and transethnic lines as "Vivian Ernestine Begay Manion Twostar. Coeur d'Alene-Navajo-Irish-Hispanic-Sioux by-marriage" (14). Vivian captures here the horizontal and inclusive connection of the heterogeneous genealogical and sociocultural determinations of her postcolonial subjectivity. The paradoxical texture of Vivian's subjectivity affirms, in the multiplication of hyphens, the disruptive breaks that are essential if the distribution of the differential constit-

uents in their entirety is to avoid collapsing differences into sameness. This articulation of postcolonial Nativeness occurs immediately after Vivian's vague description of Jose Clemente Orzoco's "Anglo-America," the tenth panel of Orzoco's murals at Dartmouth, a description that is meant to contrast with and subvert Orzoco's evident hegemonic, arborescent aestheticism and its binary logic. Critic Albert Dickerson contends that in this panel, along with the next one, "Hispano-America," Orzoco reveals his vision of the "distinct but complementary contributions to an as yet unrealized synthetic new world culture, of the English who settled in the north and the Latinos who established themselves in the south" (n. pag.). Contrary to the nomadic aesthetics of postcolonial Nativeness that circulates differences in an irrecoverable flow, Orzoco's universalism imagines a racialized, binary axiology that hypostatizes essential characteristics in the various ethnic groups, such as the Anglo values of "cooperation, deliberation, reasonableness, discipline," and the Hispanic attributes of "self-sufficiency and rebellion against imperialist oppression." Moreover, while Orzoco's orthodox ethics re-invents, in two split frames, a utopian mythic telos of sameness in the form of a "synthetic new world culture," in *The Crown of Columbus*, Vivian affirms and celebrates a multiple subjectivity constructed at the intersection of Hispanic and European multiplicities, among other racial/ethnic communities.

The production of postcolonial Nativeness eludes the apolitical universalism of Orzoco's futuristic fantasy of unity and oneness by continuously reinvesting in heterogeneous multiplicities that subtract the One and whose differences persist entirely. While it dismantles the hypodescent (one-drop-of-blood rule) ideology of monolithic racial classification, postcolonial Nativeness manages in its multiplicity to decentre the concept of race as a primary structuring narrative. Once again, Vivian Twostar affirms the inextricable differential components of her nomadic, inclusive subjectivity, which she fashions by means of the accumulative logic of the "and . . . and . . . and . . .": Vivian reconnects and rearranges her ancestors—"Irish and Coeur d'Alene and Spanish and Navajo and God knows what else" (166). The infinite openness of postcolonial Nativeness empowers the female

mixed blood to defy the fetishizing colonial tropes of monoracial taxonomy and hypodescence, for the production of her multiple subjectivity engenders excess that is impossible to capture. Her rhizomatic tendencies of excess and supplement contest the hegemonic representation of mixed bloods as the site of traduement and abnormality: “You know what they say on the side of the Bisquick box, under instructions for pancakes? Mix with fork. *Leave lumps. That was me*” (166). Moreover, Vivian engages in recoding another popular misrepresentation of mixed bloods—that of subjects entrapped in a bicultural impasse: “‘Caught between two worlds,’ is the way we’re often characterized, but I’d put it differently. We are the *catch*” (167). Rather than representing cultural hybridity as a site of anomaly, alienation, and inadequacy, postcolonial Nativeness as a “catch” is invested with the word’s musical connotation of a round of three or more voices: Vivian’s identity is similar to a round that connects heterogeneous voices, in that both would endow identities and words “which had no connection in the written text . . . a new association which could give rise to more than one interpretation” (Sadie 4:6). Deleuze and Guattari, in fact, celebrate music as a rhizomatic form that “has always sent lines of flight . . . even overturning the very codes that structure or arborify it” (*Plateaus* 11-12). Besides this precise correspondence between nomadism and postcolonial Nativeness, Vivian’s reflections on her mixed-blood subjectivity reverberate with many of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s observations on the fragmentation and narrativization of nomadic subjectivity. Constantin V. Boundas’s discussion of Deleuze’s theories of subjectivity examines how Deleuze substitutes, for the “integrative and coherentist” narratives of subjectivity central to phenomenology and hermeneutics, the concept of “narrativization as serialization,” in order to postulate the fashioning of a nomadic subjectivity based on fragmentation and multiplicity. Thus, Deleuze’s emphasis on serialization, Boundas argues, dismisses the hegemonic psychological myth of fragmentation as “loss of meaning and the collapse of personality” (100). Boundas adds that serialization locates the differential components of subjectivity adjacently, connects bundles of series together, and “places series in communication and in response

with one another, the very moment it separates the one from the other" (101). Similarly, Vivian acknowledges her subject formation as serialization by manoeuvring from and in-between bundles of series and lines of segmentation: "I'm not all anything, but I'm a little bit of a lot" (167). This sense of fragmentation in the articulation of postcolonial Nativeness never disempowers Vivian, for such a subjectivity is capable after all of appropriating unconditionally multiplicity and fragmentation. Moreover, Vivian reflects, utilizing an infinite economy of heterogeneity, on the impact of dissonant narratives on the construction of her multiple subjectivity: "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" (166). Vivian's narrativization of her subjectivity obviously is serialized to affirm opposing singularities, connecting and synthesizing them contiguously, while disjoining them from each other. As such, Vivian exposes the "crowd"³ that constitutes her postcolonial Nativeness: "To the college I am a painless affirmative action, to Roger I'm presentably exotic, to Nash [her son] I'm too conventional, to Grandma I'm too Anglo, to Hilda and Racine [her Australian colleagues] I'm the romantic American friend" (167).

Facilitating the multiplication of identity and constructing postcolonial Nativeness require Vivian Twostar to subvert the despotic fantasies of ethnocentric affiliation and its byproduct, the myth of home as the sacred locus of comfortable pleasures. Hence, Vivian not only transcends the invisibility of the margin imposed on her by the centre but succeeds in "escap[ing] the claustrophobia of belonging," adding that "what you lack in security you gain by realizing—as those insiders never do—that security is an illusion" (167). After this rupture, Vivian starts a continual mapping of new lines of becoming, of connecting with other differential heterogeneities. Here, postcolonial Nativeness expands the conditions of specific temporal and spatial heterogeneity into global linkages. In her quest for the lost crown of Columbus, Vivian comes across a collection of shells that bear Hebrew inscriptions. As she reads the translation, she forges new connections: "I stared at the cryptic designs, now written in blue with a Bic pen on a piece of Native American Studies stationery.

Then I had a thought. Perhaps this was the work of the first voyage's official translator, Louis de Torres" (211). Collapsing spatial/temporal, past/present, and East/West dichotomies is even more evident when Vivian cracks the box open, as the globe contracts in a single space: "The world has become a small place, all parts connected, where a Native using an ancient Asian art can break into an old European box, witnessed by someone who grew up in Australia" (492). Asian martial arts, African cooking, Euro-American technology, and Native American myths and chants share an equal ontological status without effacing their heterogeneities and without ceasing to connect and circulate in new ways, pulling in the much-needed discourse of hope for "equity and respect between worlds" (469). As she compares her displacement to that of Columbus, Vivian contends that "[he] had to think global because the whole world was the only context in which he was unambiguously a full member" (168).

Comparing oneself with Christopher Columbus is not ironic for a postcolonial Native subject. The invocation of this postcolonial imperative to blur the Self/Other, oppressor/victim, and subject/object dichotomies in the production of postcolonial Nativeness is a prerequisite for mapping new intensities, flows, and movements of multiplicities. In their efforts to overthrow State, or the root-tree structures, Deleuze and Guattari urgently appeal for the elimination of dichotomies, because the "binary logic is the spiritual reality" of the oppressive arborescent system, which lacks any "understanding of multiplicity" (*Plateaus* 5). The inherent problem of binarism is that the differences it intends to circulate automatically are transformed into distinctions of symbolic valuation and hierarchical ordering, legitimizing the atrocities and injustices of the superiors against their Others. Nomads and rhizomes, therefore, can never invest in dualisms, which assume a "unity to serve as pivot in the object, or to divide in the subject" (8). As such, the postcolonial Native subject "can no longer even dichotomize, but accedes to a higher unity, of ambivalence or overdetermination, in an always-supplementary dimension to that of its object" (6). Exceeding the binary logic that has corroded the interracial encounters between whites and Natives, Erdrich and Dorris use discursive

try. At what might be called the soft end of discourse about Aborigines are texts which represent them as fixed in a permanent state of childhood, infants to the colonizers' adults. Consider, for example, the following exchange, from *A Mother's Offering to Her Children*, between Mrs. Saville, Julius, and Lucy, in which they discuss a tree native to Australia:

Julius: The Natives find the Bangalee very useful. You know their little baskets are bits of bark of the Bangalee, tied up at each end; and their canoes are just the same, only larger.

Lucy: How droll they look paddling along so fast. Their little oars look like fishes' fins.

Mrs. S: So they do, Lucy. (13)

Julius and Lucy here represent "the Natives" as children, a meaning constructed through the repetition of "little" and through the implication that such activities as making baskets and paddling canoes are in themselves childish, having more to do with play than with work. The fact that the comments made here are by the Saville children serves to accentuate the gap between childish (native) adults and mature (white) children and to allow for the latter treating the former like indulgent adults observing children at play. When Lucy remarks, "How droll they look," she evokes the gaze by which the colonizer finds the colonized less than adult and less than white, objects of amusement or condescension reinforcing the superiority of the colonizer.

What I am suggesting is that what may appear in *A Mother's Offering to Her Children* to be nothing more than a somewhat condescending mockery of the indigenous is in fact a discursive strategy which seeks to reinforce those sturdy binaries on which colonization depends: white and black, civilized and savage, adult and child; often, as well, male and female. In another episode from *A Mother's Offering to Her Children*, the officers of a trading vessel meet a group of Torres Strait Islanders, off the far north coast of Australia:

Mrs. S: There were women among [the natives], who came on board without hesitation. They were not remarkable for youth nor beauty. Being without clothing, the officers undertook to dress out one, and the boatswain another.

similar to hers: "He couldn't be all he said he was, yet I recognized the fiction that he had constructed and presented, never twice the same. He was a certain kind of man in court, another in the Caribbean; a mercenary, a saint, a scholar, a fanatic, and, of course, a slave trader" (168). Later, Vivian asserts that Columbus shares a multiple, nomadic subjectivity with her, for he did not fit anywhere, as his presence was always dislocated across racial, religious, educational, and linguistic determinants. The seduction of Columbus lies in his power to interrupt all fictions of consistency and hypostatization, and these interruptions generate a nomadic space of displacement and linkages that make him non-localizable:

An Italian in Iberia. A Jew in Christendom. A *Converso* among the baptized-at-birth. A layman among Franciscans. He spoke all languages with a foreign accent, and his sight was always fixed away from the heartland. He did not completely fit in, anywhere, and that was his engine. He was propelled by alienation, by trying to forge links, to be the link, from one human cluster to the next. (168)

This unconventional decoding of the prevalent myths of Columbus operates to obliterate the distinctions between oppressor/victim and Self/Other, which underlie Columbus's imperial discourse of conquest.

Besides subverting the polarization of European colonizer/native oppressed, Erdrich and Dorris also dismantle, in the relationship between Vivian and Roger, the masculine/feminine dualism. Narrating his meeting with Vivian in the dining room of the Hanover Inn to discuss his future paternal responsibilities, Roger says, "[Vivian] reached across the table and covered my hand with hers. There was something patronizing, irritating, in the gesture, and then I realized it was a typically masculine ploy. I had seen men reach across the table in similar situations, pinning down the hand of a spouse to hold her attention" (64). The intention here is not simply to reverse the traditional categorization of men as masculine and women as feminine, or the colonial representation of Euro-Americans as virile and the natives as womanly. Rather, by narrating Vivian's "masculine" advances from Roger Williams's perspective, the authors present a white European male unlearning the androcentric privileges of West-

ern patriarchy, what Deleuze and Guattari call "becoming-woman" (*Plateaus* 275).⁴ Evacuating male identity of its stereotypical overvalorization of the phallus and its symbolic investments, Deleuze and Guattari argue, is "not imitating or assuming the female form, but emitting particles that enter the relation of movement and rest, or the zone of proximity, of a microfemininity, in other words, that produce in us a molecular woman, create the molecular woman" (*Plateaus* 275). Roger's becoming-woman is articulated more directly later: "Why was I invariably so passive, especially in this relationship? Vivian led, I followed. She proposed, I objected or reluctantly assented. More and more, I treated Vivian as though she possessed the only map of our future" (89). For Deleuze and Guattari, becoming-woman is another line of deterritorialization, or decoding, that can facilitate the emission and deployment of multiplicities along and across higher plateaus of gender and sexual differences.

Roger Williams's becoming-woman is the course that will lead him ultimately to becoming-minoritarian, that is, to the recognition of the slippage of Otherness in his own identity. This un-making and re-making of white subjectivity is done with much comic playfulness and humour, but without affecting the seriousness of this discussion of postcolonial subjectivity. Roger's narrative, which deploys cross-cultural motifs, functions both to overthrow the Cartesian rationality that supposedly deemed Eurocentrism superior to other mythic epistemologies as well as to affirm, by following Navajo vision quests, becoming-minoritarian. As Sam Gill explains in his *Sacred Words: A Study of the Navajo Religion and Prayer*, in these vision quests an individual, seeking enlightenment about himself and the world, experiences a succession of tests and ordeals. Consequently, in the multi-layered world of the cosmos, the hero ascends triumphant from the underworld to the upper worlds (50-52). After puncturing the raft and jumping off of it to save his daughter Violet, Roger faces a shark and ends up in a subterranean cave for three days. Roger experiences a negative intensity of terror and alienation in that space of utterly blank darkness: "and I was now blind, or I was looking out into a blackness so deep I had never experienced anything like it" (404). All of his repressed fears return to

him immediately, especially his “phobic horror” of bats, which parodies the hero’s struggles with underworldly monsters in Navajo vision quests. Moreover, Roger’s insistence upon thinking rationally as a means of survival is mocked in his illusionary encounter with an underworldly gigantic reptile, which turns out to be nothing but a rope. Roger imagines the rope to be “a huge bristly snake,” which he describes

as long as a sea serpent, long enough to finally stretch the distance from roof to floor, and in panic I tried to think of a weapon with which to defend myself. . . . A vision of myself, Odysseus armed with an unbent paper clip confronting a giant cobra, flashed into my imagination, but before it could jell and be dismissed, the reptile checked its fall and hung suspended, a swaying bridge between day and night. (464)

Roger is rescued by Vivian, however, and both ascend to the world of light and rebirth not only with new investments in the multiplicities of their own identities but also with the proof that will undo the injustices committed against the Natives and their lands.

Reinvestments in the diverse components of cultural memory, such as the Navajo vision quest, might appear anti-nomadic, especially with Deleuze’s and Guattari’s characterization of nomadism as “anti-memory,” “anti-genealogy,” and “reterritorialization on deterritorialization itself” (*Plateaus* 11, 16, 381). According to Deleuze and Guattari, nomads are the “vectors of deterritorialization” (382) and, as such, “it is deterritorialization that constitutes the relation to the earth, to such a degree that the nomad reterritorializes on deterritorialization itself” (381). The consequence of these constant displacements and relocations is the divestment of the land’s central symbolic and emotional capital, its transformation into nothing but an unnatural supplement: “It is the earth that deterritorializes itself, in a way that provides the nomad with a territory. The land ceases to be land, tending to become simply ground (*sol*) or support” (381). However, Erdrich’s and Dorris’s re-investment in cultural memory and its symbolic specificities rescues nomadism from the downfall of apolitical universalism. Yet it should be emphasized that Deleuze and Guattari’s nomadism never contends to obliterate or erase local cultural continuities, since rhizomes subsume

arborescences and vice versa: "There exist tree or root structures in rhizomes; conversely, a tree branch or root division may begin to burgeon into a rhizome" (5, 20). Deleuze and Guattari cannot allow themselves to reinscribe a rhizome/tree binary opposition, but "put them to strange new uses" (15). Vivian captures the value of re-inserting roots, when she contends, "[m]y roots spread in every direction, and if I water one set of them more often than others, it's because they need it more" (167). Thus, to repoliticize the nomadic underpinnings of postcolonial Nativeness, Vivian Twostar needs to exceed essentialization while re-inserting roots into, and intensifying connections with, land, oral tradition, and history. Yet this reappropriative discourse is not allowed to reify into a foundationalist orthodoxy, for at that moment when memory, tribe, and sacred tribal geography sediment to form the basis of another rigid orthodoxy, Erdrich and Dorris rupture and exceed them.

Postcolonial Nativeness insists upon capitalizing on physical territory in the production of subjectivity, that is, in the reterritorialization on territory itself. In her "Where I Ought To Be: A Writer's Sense of Place," Erdrich argues that the extreme symbolic value of land for dispossessed communities, which were eradicated by ethnic genocide long ago, increases in post-modern America. The natives are facing a cultural genocide due to the overvalorization of mass culture and the devaluation of land. However, Natives never stop investing in their ancestral territories, because identity is conflated with land:

In a tribal view of the world, where one place has been inhabited for generations, the landscape becomes enlivened by a sense of group and family history. Unlike most contemporary writers, a traditional storyteller fixes listeners in an unchanging landscape combined of myth and reality. People and places are inseparable. (485)

The fundamental narrative of *The Crown of Columbus* is the quest for the symbolic legal signification of the thorny crown, which will prove that Columbus himself acknowledged the natives' legal parity and their "full right to govern their own territory" (276). This move would enable indigenous populations to regain ownership over their long-confiscated lands. Thus Vivian goes to great trouble not only to decipher the letter but also to

find the crown, which “was the missing ingredient in every indigenuous claim and repatriation case from Long Island to Hawaii” (276). And, indeed, the potential results are astonishing: “The prospects for victories—here, in Brazil, in New Zealand, in Mexico—appear better than anyone would have expected” (500).

Moreover, Vivian’s closeness to land would corroborate her continuities with the local cultural memory. In her interview, Erdrich notes that “we cannot abandon our need for reference, identity or our pull to landscapes that mirror our most intense feelings” (491). Likewise, Vivian believes in the power of roots to heal, as seen in the scene in which she is in labour. At that moment, the soothing images of the grandmother and the earth connect:

I remembered the cloth bag that Grandma had sent, and made Racine open it. When he did, the odor of sweetgrass drifted around me, the smoke of sage, the scent of the bark of red cedar. For a moment I left the room and was once again on reservation land, in the close, dark containment of the women’s sweat lodge, murmuring the right words of prayer. I saw the glowing rocks, heard the sizzle of water thrown from a dipper, the steam so hot my eyelashes burned on my cheeks and my breath seared my hands. I drew strength from the physical peace of being where I was meant to be, next to earth.

(126)

The presence of the grandmother defies nomadism’s anti-genealogy and anti-memory, operating as a productive linkage not only to the land but also to cultural memory. The centrality of this healer grandmother as a transmitter of tribal myths, beliefs, language, chants, and blessings is evident in her role in re-aculturating Vivian’s teenage son, Nash (37). However, she is not the ethnocentric or the missing authentic reservation Native in the novel, for she is as much concerned about practising Christianity. Unhappy about Vivian’s liaison with Roger, the grandmother plays the trickster, accusing her of sexual sin by inventing an unconventional ending to Columbus: “They brought him back to Spain in iron chains, she continued. He had a *mistress*” (153).

According to Deleuze and Guattari, nomadology is the “opposite of history” (*Plateaus* 23), because history is a State archive

which documents the victories of the despotic regime and excludes from it the voices of the oppressed and vanquished. And in "Rewriting History," Michael Dorris identifies this despotic regime as the traditional Western history of "powerful European males" (134), which "claims unto it, intrinsically and forever, the comprehensive planetary narrative" (135). To monopolize history, European oppressors establish through documentation their right over distant peoples and lands; Vivian emphasizes the centrality of documentation, both oral and written, in imperial practices: "[Columbus] took official possession of all that was before him simply by speaking certain formulaic words—making sure that the secretary carefully recorded and the comptroller duly witnessed what fell from his lips" (249). In contrast to the Western obsession with documentation, the indigenous peoples lacked any scripts that can memorialize their history. Thus Vivian wonders how her great-grandmother felt about the victory of the Sioux and Cheyenne in the battle of the Little Big Horn:

How would the story of Custer's defeat be expressed in Coeur d' Alene, and would it be the source of celebration or anxiety? She had left no record of her thoughts, no parallel to Elijah Cobb's cavil, and yet she occupied the same country, lived and died within the shadow of the same events. (181)

This lack is supplanted by the authors' counter-memory historiography, which rescues the natives from anonymity, reinvesting them with a voice and a name, but without essentializing or romanticizing them. Dorris suggests the urgent need to provide "voices and personalities for the Taino and other groups peripheral to a European world-view" without "condescending, romanticizing, or fabricating" ("Rewriting History" 138, 137). Thus, in *The Crown of Columbus*, the narrative of the local girl, Valerie who rescued Violet (3-4), re-writes that spectacle in Columbus's *Diary* in which the Admiral describes the predominantly male natives who came ashore to welcome him: "All of them go around as naked as their mothers bore them; and the women also, although I did not see more than one quite young girl" (qtd. in Erdrich and Dorris 6). In place of the absence of women and the anonymity of the little girl, the authors re-inscribe the centrality of women on Eleuthera and a voice and a name to that little girl.

Vivian's postcolonial Native subjectivity, however, contests and problematizes the fantasy of reclaiming even an imaginary home or nation, or "the claustrophobia of belonging," as seen in the narrative of her trip to Eleuthera to uncover the crown of Columbus. Postcolonial Nativeness declines to ossify this temporary fantasy of repossessing sacred tribal geography and cultural memory, for the mythic utopia of home cannot be reappropriated comfortably in the contemporary conditions of shifting, contingent, and imagined identities. Thus the gravitation of Violet's raft to Eleuthera should not be reduced to a metonymic slippage into a symbolic recuperation of the whole indigenous lands of the Americas; nor should the alliterative deployment of the letter "V" that connects the local girl, Valerie, to Vivian, and to her baby daughter, Violet, be simplified to a reinvention of matrilineal genealogical continuity, or of primordial links to the Native American nations. As such, Erdrich's and Dorris's characterization of Valerie is not meant to romanticize the descendants of the Taino Natives; rather, they represent her in a comic tone that displays her childish simplicity, in order to recognize the Tainos's humanity and "instantly shatter [their] static stereotype," as Dorris argues in "Rewriting History" (138). This laggard girl spends her time raking the beach, "doing exactly what she was best at. Nothing" (3). Moreover, in a nomadic feminist fashion, the traditionally homogenized category of native woman is fractured in that confrontational moment between Vivian and a local woman, Eunice, and in the representation of Vivian as an alien among the natives, who refer to her as a "white tourist woman" (509). In addition, Vivian ruptures the European exploiter/native victim polarization by a spectacular appropriation and display of the exploitative semantics of colonialism: "The language I used was that of another time, another place. It was the vocabulary of the colonizer. Discovery. Possession. How different *was* I from the construct I fabricated?" (269). Later, Vivian perceives the extent to which she is implicated in the colonial trope of egoistic self-aggrandizement:

[Cobb, Roger, and Vivian] seemed suddenly like predators, parasites —Cobb⁵ most of all, but each of us desired something. We had come to Eleuthera to steal away some fantasy of our own. Roger wanted

local color, inspiration. I was after vindication. And Cobb . . . he was determined to strike gold. What did we have to do with the pulse of life in this place? (304)

Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris pose in this comic and playful thriller a serious intellectual challenge to the current controversy over the precise trajectory of postcolonialism. Rather than pitting anti-colonialism against postcolonialism, the authors represent that problematic space of displacement that postcolonial Nativeness occupies to allow for the critical and paradoxical remapping of these two discourses. The production of post-colonial theory and practice by mixed-blood writers deserves more critical attention, for their works virtually offer a much more complicated problematization of identity production than do the conventional and dull paradigms of authenticity (ethnocentrism) or assimilation.⁶

NOTES

- 1 Some reviewers dismissed *The Crown of Columbus* as a trashy thriller, overlooking the subversive humour Erdrich and Dorris use to negotiate the problematics of identity and difference. Skeptical about the authors' literary intentions, Nina King and Róbert Warrior stress that the thriller was timed for Columbus's quincentenary; and Michiko Kakutani and Kirkpatrick Sale regard it as a profitable transaction and an entertaining, escapist fiction.
- 2 Conceptualizing postcolonial subjectivity in the operative semantics of nomadism can work to disentangle marginalized subjectivities from the following problems: from the colonial subtext of both mimicry and hybridity, a problem in the work of Homi Bhabha, as seen in Robert Young's critique; from transposing the indeterminacy of hybridity into the naturalizing technology of assimilation, as E. K. Brathwaite contends; from celebrating the interstitial location and detachment of the "specular border intellectual" that Abdul JanMohamed's sees in Edward Said's "traveling" praxis; and from the effacement of traces of subaltern voices in Gayatri Spivak, as Benita Parry shows. In fact, the nomadic validation of agency in the production of meaning can explain the popularity of nomadism in cultural studies and reception theory, such as the works of Lawrence Grossberg, Janice Radway, and Meaghan Morris.
- 3 In their celebration of "multiplicity," Deleuze and Guattari inaugurate *A Thousand Plateaus* with a heightened sense of multiplication: "The two of us wrote *Anti-Oedipus* together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a *crowd*" (3).
- 4 Feminist critics such as Rosi Braidotti and Elizabeth Grosz have debunked the concept of "becoming-woman," because, they argue, in using this concept Deleuze and Guattari co-opt women as a fetish of pure difference and erase their sexual difference, which is still considered indispensable for feminist struggles at this historical conjuncture. Nevertheless, applied in a postcolonial feminist critique of the colonialist practices of Western feminists, "becoming-woman" can still be a valid argument.
- 5 As a symbol of Western imperialism, Cobb's name is probably derived from a character in B. Traven's *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1935). Dobb, in Traven's

thriller, embodies the ferocity of the imperialist ethics of capitalism: he feels superior to Mexican Natives, resorts to violence for the most trivial reasons, and cheats his own partners, Howard and Curtin.

- ⁶ I would like to thank Professor Kathryn Hume, the anonymous reviewers of *ARIEL*, and Marie B. Velez for their useful comments and invaluable help in writing this article.

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