

## **Euroamerican Discursive Subjection of Native Americans**

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### **Abstract**

Native Americans are one of the unfortunate communities most horribly subjected to racial discrimination. From day one of the “contact” Euroamerican discursivity misrepresented Native Americans for white ulterior motives of exploitation and subjugation. History, literature, religion, media, politics – all the discursive resources that whites could invoke for their support – were manipulated to forward colonial suppressive agenda in the name of civilization and culture. They were branded as “cannibals” and “primitive” in order to snatch their lands and to force them to migrate from one region to the next, southwards and farther south. Dehumanization of the Natives was rooted in the unshakable belief of the whites in the superiority of their values and inferiority of Native Americans, the *others*. White education meant for the Indians was a tool of making them subordinate to Christianity, and “law” was meant to prove illegality of their right to live. Even the Bible was manipulated to forward the colonial agenda. Euroamerican discourse exteriorized Native Americans as objects to be studied and worked upon rather than as human beings with very rich diversity of languages and cultures. They went through racial genocide at the hands of Euroamerican colonizers and to justify the genocide they were misconstrued by the whole plethora of White discourses. Whites imposed images, policies, wars, and religious and economic practices on tribal people to the advantage of Whites and the disadvantage of Natives. This article explores the discursive subjection of the Native Americans by Euroamerican discourses.

**Keywords:** *Euroamerican representation, misconception, discourse, Native Americans, subjection*

### **Introduction**

Positivist objective account reduces discourse to pre-existing reality whereas Foucault conceives creation of objects within discourse. Discursive practices constitute and determine objects rather than the other way round. Discourse is concerned with particular systems of knowledge such as natural history, grammar, biology, sciences of philosophy, etc. In this sense discourses consist of the four basic elements that construct the truth: i- the objects: about which the statements are issued; ii- the places of speaking: from which statements are enunciated; iii- the concepts: involved in the formation of discourse; and iv- the themes and theories they develop. In case of Native Americans, all the ‘places of speaking’ have been

occupied by the Euroamericans: priests, explorers, adventurers, occupants, soldiers, writers, media, movies, presidents, funding agencies, and judges. All these speaking 'authorities' unanimously developed the concepts that Native Americans 'are' essentially primitive and their existence is a serious threat to *civilization*.

## Theoretical Framework

Discourse constructs 'truth' for acceptance by those who live and experience it whether they are targets or practitioners of it. Antonio Gramsci (1971) conceives "the whole fabric of society . . . as the complex of superstructures": civil society and the state (p. 12). In a society, 'the ensemble of organisms,' with its private dimension, civil society, and the state, 'the political society,' the organizational and connective functions are performed in the following ways:

- i- "The spontaneous 'consent' given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group . . .
- ii- The apparatus of state coercive power which legally enforces discipline on those groups who do not 'consent' either actively or passively. This apparatus is, however, constituted for the whole of society in anticipation of moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed." (Gramsci, p. 12)

This article is concerned with the first one that is the historico-ideological dimension of the American society whose white dominant group because of prestigious position in American society through discursive construction produced Native Americans' *consent* to submit to 'superior' white civilization. Fairclough (1989) calls it "linguistic determination of society" (19). Franz Boas questions: "How do we recognize the shackles that tradition has placed upon us?" "For if we recognize them, we are also able to break them," he answers (as cited in Fairclough, p. 1). Drawing a broad distinction between "the exercise of power through coercion of various sorts including physical violence, and the exercise of power through the manufacture of consent to or at least acquiescence towards it," Fairclough observes that "[i]deology is the prime means of manufacturing consent" (1989, pp.3-4).

Michel Foucault theorizes that there are three types of rules according to which discursive objects are created:

- i- Surfaces of emergence - are the sets of social relations in which some practices are observed as objects of scientific inquiry.
- ii- Authorities of delimitation - are the authorities empowered to decide which objects fall under/belong to which discursive formation.
- iii- Grids of formation - function to classify and relate various objects according to their properties and symptoms. (Mills, 2003)

In case of Euroamerican-Native American surfaces of emergence, after the fall of Aztec and Inca empires, Whites – the authorities of delimitation – exteriorized Native Americans as objects of socio-political discursive inquiry and the process continued for five centuries. This article explores the relationship of Native Americans with Euro-American juridico-political, socio-cultural, academic and media structures, the authorities that discursively ‘formed’ them as objects in relationship with white Americans.

Foucault claims that our perception of reality is determined by discourse. For instance, he demonstrates in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* that discourses on sexuality transformed sex into discourse (Foucault, 1986). It is a misinterpretation that for Foucault non-discursive is non-existent as it may seem from his view of discourse as a determining factor. Discursive structures available to us make possible an interpretation of the material world; its interpretation, and not its existence, is the issue. Laclou and Mouffe clarify Foucauldian position on reality as follows:

The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has nothing to do whether there is a world external to thought . . . An earthquake or falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of ‘natural phenomena’ or expressions of ‘the wrath of God’ depends on the structuring of a discursive field. (Laclou & Mouffe, p. 108)

The relationship between discursive and non-discursive can be understood by the law of difference as well which is the difference between what the rules of grammar and logic allow to be said and what is actually said. This difference constitutes the field of discursivity. The difference in case of Native Americans is that they were very humane and hospitable to Christopher Columbus and his crew and later early settlers who “might not have survived had it not been for the help of friendly Indians, who taught them how to grow native plants – pumpkin, squash, bean and corn” (United States Information Agency 13). Native Americans were generous, kind and hospitable as Columbus and his crew witnessed when they reached Hispaniola in 1492. Columbus observed in his log book that they will give you anything in exchange of what you offer them. It is more than five centuries since Columbus set foot on San Salvador and more than four centuries since the English colonized Virginia and New England resulting in complete obliteration of the friendly Tainos who welcomed Columbus. What Columbus found, in his own words, was an island “very big and very level and the trees very green . . . the whole of it so green that it is a pleasure to gaze upon” (Brown, p. 6) but which was rendered a wasteland by his

descendants' lustful destruction of human, animal, bird, fish, and plant inhabitants of the region.

Bartolome de las Casas is the only major source of what happened to Haitians after the arrival of Columbus. As a young priest, he participated in the invasion of Cuba (Zinn, p. 4). Once he had a big agricultural farm where Indian slaves worked. But he relinquished it and severely criticized the Spaniards when he started writing the history of Indians in which he writes that the Spaniards were amazed to see how nicely Indians treated women. The Indians as a cultural community looked upon total nudity as normally as we look upon somebody's head or his hands. Archdeacon of the town where they were put to sale reported that although the slaves were "naked as the day they were born," they showed "no more embarrassment than the animals" (Zinn, p. 3).

Las Casas writes that the Spaniards "thought nothing of knifing Indians by tens and twenties and of cutting slices off them to test the sharpness of their blades" (Zinn, p. 5). In Cuba, 7000 children died within three months. Some mothers desperately drowned their babies lest they should face the atrocities their parents faced (Zinn, p. 5). When Las Casas reached Hispaniola in 1508, he writes: "There lived only 60,000 people including Indians. It means more than three million people fell victims to war, slavery or mines" (Zinn, p. 5). But the history taught to the Indian children deceptively starts with brave adventures, no bloodshed entailing 'Columbus Day' as a festival to be celebrated with absolute unanimity. Only recently it has come to be questioned. William Apess says about 22<sup>nd</sup> of December and 4<sup>th</sup> of July:

[Let] the day be dark. The 22<sup>nd</sup> day of December [which he offers as the day the pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock]; let it be forgotten in celebration, in your speeches, and by the burying of the rock that your fathers put your foot upon . . . [L]et every man of color wrap himself in mourning, for the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December and the 4<sup>th</sup> of July are days of mourning and not of joy. (Apess, p. 286)

Vizenor also criticizes the process of history that contributes to the misshaping of the truth: "In the dominant narrative of colonization, representation is employed as an act of annihilation so that what is not included – loving Native community structures or unsustainable colonial violence – becomes invisible to the process of history keeping" (Lopezina, p. 675). Gary B. Nash writes about the Iroquois tribal society inhabiting the north eastern jungles before the arrival of the Europeans:

No laws and ordinances, sheriffs and constables, judges and juries, or courts and jails – the apparatus of authority in

European societies – were to be found in the northeast woodlands prior to European arrival. Yet boundaries of acceptable behavior were firmly set. The Iroquois maintained a strict sense of right and wrong . . . He who stole another's food or acted invalorously in war was shamed by his people and ostracized from their company until he atoned for his actions. (Zinn, p. 19)

The question is how then they grew into *cannibals* and *primitive*. It was 'constructionist' power of discourse that commoners, political elite and academia were all 'made to think' and 'feel' against the logic that 'kill the Indian and save the man' was only possible formula to safeguard *civilization*. The white field of discursivity constituted them as an anathema to humanity. This research explores the dimensions of the white discursivity that misconstrued the Native Americans.

### **Euro-American Subjection of the Natives**

Misconstruction of the Natives dates back to the first White-Indian contact with the arrival of Columbus, who wrote in his journal of 12<sup>th</sup> October 1492 that Natives "should be good servants and of quick intelligence, since they very soon say what is said to them, and I believe they would be very easily made Christian for it appeared to me they had no creed" (Lundquist, p. 17). He also suggested that they had *no language* because he promised to the King that he would bring some of them so that they might be taught how to talk. Later on, Montaigne observed in his essay *Of Cannibals* (1580) that the Natives lived without civilized qualities, in 'a state of purity' without political rivalries, slavery, mathematics, clothes, and agriculture. As the title of the essay suggests, he believes that they ate up their captives but considers it *innocent barbarism* (1128). In Shakespeare's *Tempest* (1611), Prospero controls Caliban who is the Native on the island inhabited by Prospero. Caliban's name is, incidentally an anagram of cannibal. Despite the fact that Caliban learnt language he is not granted citizenship rights in Prospero's kingdom because he wants to marry Prospero's daughter, Miranda. Caliban is characterized as subhuman, incapable of learning the delicate sentiments like forgiveness, reconciliation and repentance. Towards the end of the play he is made to say:

Ay, that I will; and I'll be *wise hereafter*  
And seek for grace. What a *thrice-double ass* [emphasis added]  
*Was I*, to take this drunkard for a god,  
And worship this dull fool! *The Tempest*, Act V, Sc. I)

Milton, in *Paradise Lost* (1667, Book IX), looks upon Natives as innocent, regrettably innocent, for their lack of access to redemption because they

have no knowledge of good and evil, no ability to reason, and hence can only be characterized as the 'noble savage'. Robert F. Berkhofer rightly argues, "Whites overwhelmingly measure the Indian as a general category against those beliefs, values, or institutions they most cherished in themselves at the time" (p. 27). The Indians are always on the wrong side of the binaries: Christian/heathen; civilized/uncivilized; free/bound; rational/passionate; progressive/regressive; domestic/wild; enlightened/ignorant; industrious/indolent.

The record of the students of Harvard's Indian College, one of the earliest British academic institutions in America, shows that the aim of the education of the Indians was to prepare promising proselytes "who could later propagate the gospel as well as European civilization among their tribes" (Hochbruck, p. 1). Two students were killed and many fell victims to disease and "only one Indian, Caleb Cheeshateaumuck, class of 1665, completed the four year program" (Jaskoski, p. 2). What he learnt was internalization of the colonial agenda and justification of exploitation and love for servitude. Here follows an extract from his speech:

How powerful are the force and virtue of education and refined literature in the transformation of the nature of barbarians. They are like trees, rocks, and brute beasts, and a substantive change (metamorphosis) must be effected in them . . . God delegated you to be our patrons, and He endowed with all wisdom and intimate compassion, so that you might perform the work of bringing blessings to us pagans. (Hochbruck, p. 5)

The position adopted by Caleb is, at best, of cultural collaboration and even contribution to the master narrative of colonial Puritan discourse.

Euro-American literature has two kinds of attitudes towards the Native Americans: indifference and misrepresentation. In the huge mass of American literature, the presence of the Natives is a rare phenomenon; there are mostly passing references for the sake of the plot necessity and that too in very unfavorable colors. They are never the actual focus. Arthur Miller refers to Alaska as a place of success for Willy Loman's elder brother Ben (in Miller's *Death of a Salesman*) but he does not tell us that it was "home to 86000 Natives" (Porter & Poemer, p. 39). *Crucible* (1953) refers to the religious blame-game that allegorically spans the Salem Massachusetts area of 1692, allegoric representation of the blame-game of the McCarthy era of 1950s and present day religious-racial conflicts by implication. But the Natives are referred to only as a community living in the jungles occasionally disturbing the peace of the Whites who were gradually developing a progressive society.

## Construction of Native Americans as a Vanishing Vicious Race

Early British academic institutions like Harvard Indian College were established to produce a class of Indians ready to serve white purposes. Eleazar Wheelock opened his Indian Charity-School in Lebanon, Connecticut in 1754. He observed that Indians had serious trust-deficit in the English and the solution was to approach them through other Indians: he believed that it was necessary to dislocate the Indian students from their families to “cure them of such savage and sordid practices, as they have been inured to from their mothers’ womb” (p. 25). Calvin was a student of Wheelock who came under his influence in 1757 and who kept writing to him consistently with ‘uneasiness’ as a recurring motif:

*I am uneasy, & it seems to me Dr. Wheelock does not give me leave to go, I must go without leave but I had rather go with a Dismission, not without liberty, but I am uneasy enough to do either of them . . . I am uneasy [emphasis added], Sir . . . Your Undutiful Pupil Hezekial Calvin.* (Jaskoski, p. 21)

The language of the letter reflects a symbolic violence that is a marked feature of the relationship between the so called fathers and sons, masters and slaves. He kept writing letters showing his desperate desire to return home and ultimately his silence becomes a statement of liberation from Dr. Wheelock.

Since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century ‘the vanishing Indian’ ideology has shaped the fate of Native Americans. Accordingly, the Native Americans who resisted expansionism have been interpreted as savage hero, valiant and bold but bound to be doomed. From colonial times onwards, English aggression was the pivotal cause of animosity for the Indians. From 1790 to 1830, the Indian population of the western states “rose from less than 3 percent to 28 percent of the total US population, marking one of the great migrations in world history” (Rogin, p. 4). Anglo-Saxonism, the sense of superiority of the white race, explicitly rejected the ‘Red Indians’ as an inferior race and the claim was consolidated through science, social philosophy and history. From the 18<sup>th</sup> century well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the enlightenment view had its proponents among whites that Red Indians were an improvable and innately equal race but after 1830 the view was no more defensible:

Indian removal represented a major victory for ideas which, though long latent in American society, became fully explicit only after 1830. Political power was exercised by those who believed the Indians to be inferior, who did not wish them to be accepted as equals within American

society, and who expected them ultimately to disappear. In shaping an Indian policy American politicians reflected the new truthfulness of racial confidence. (Horsman, p. 190)

It is this context that marks William Apess' concern for ruthlessness in his 1836 address. He refers to King Philip II's vision of the would-be white atrocity to the Natives:

How deep, then, was the thought of Philip, when he could look from Maine to Georgia, and from the ocean to the lakes, and view with one look all his brethren withering before the more enlightened to come; and how true his prophecy, that the white people not only cut down their groves but would enslave them . . . our groves and hunting grounds are gone, our dead are dug up, our council fires are put out, and a foundation was laid in the first legislature to enslave our people, by taking from them all rights, which has been strictly adhered to ever since. (Apess, p. 306)

While the nineteenth century minstrels portrayed African Americans satirically, the second half of the century focused on the stereotypical construction of the Native Americans, not through satire but as a nostalgic symbol of bygone days. They were constructed after the American Civil War not as "innocents destroyed by modern civilization (but as) violent and vicious threats to the progress of modern civilization" (Kent, p. 71). The Euro-American discourse in the form of fiction, cartoon, film, and advertisement constructed vicious and violent people antonymous to progress and civilization. Jeris-way, a Native American in a 1945 newspaper advertisement of hair tonic was presented as a symbol of everything "not modern" (Kent, p. 71). Native Americans were mournfully stereotyped as a casualty of modernity for their inability to adapt to it. Some columnists warned that "if the Indians are successful, there will be protests by Lions, Tigers, and Marlins – indicating that Indians are still classified as wildlife instead of human beings" (Deloria, pp. 7-8). Suzanne Evertsen Lundquist sums up the case: "Whites have imposed images, policies, wars, and religious and economic practices on tribal peoples to the advantage of Whites and the disadvantage of Natives" (p. 17).

Franz Boas performed revolutionary work for the Indian oral literatures in challenging the theory of unilateral human evolution through a racial hierarchy in which the dark-skinned savages fall on the lowest rung. He refuted the biased and unscientific concept of superiority or inferiority of cultures and proposed the scientific approach that cultures developed according to their environmental contexts. Boas feared that by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century there was hardly any Indian culture "uninfluenced by whites"



(Dippie, p. 232). The project was derogatorily called 'salvage' anthropology and demonstrated the significance of the Indian cultures but the negative implications and influences of such anthropological ventures was that they presented the Indians as objects of past history to be preserved in museums and literature. Vine Deloria Jr. says that from the 1890s to the 1960s the Native Americans were "truly the Vanishing Americans . . . and for most Americans Indians had ceased to exist" (p. 1). The Boasian view of cultural plurality saw the Indians' inability to adapt to modernism. Boas and Edward Curtis's work is important in developing the nostalgic view of Indians as being close to nature in the negative sense: violent and exotic savages, a vanishing race whose Indianness could be preserved only through photographs before they totally disappeared (Curtis, p. 1972):

Invoking the paintings of Paul Gauguin and Henri Rousseau, Curtis' image presents the Native woman as simple and uncivilized in her nakedness and celebrates a lack of civilization for its innocence and distance from societal evils. Curtis's work arguably most exoticized Native American women and girls, tapping into centuries of objectification by non-Indian historians, anthropologists, and writers who saw Indian women as exotic not only for their primitiveness but also because of their gender. (Kent, p. 80)

Here again the Indians are constructed in exotic images of the people who never existed. Like Boas, Curtis too constructs a paternal discourse of preservation but essentializes them as primitive and unchanging under the guise of protection. The manufactured authenticity of his work becomes more important than actual authenticity. The consistent discursive focus is to shift them from living culture to an imaginary community non-existent in actuality and indifferent to the "demographic evidence that the Native American population has been increasing since 1890" (Kent, p. 81).

Oliver La Farge, an anthropologist with a significant role in official policy matters on the Natives, visited the Navajo country towards the end of the 1920s and concluded: "The Indian story had to end in tragedy" (*Raw Material*, p. 177). This view about Indians as peoples doomed to death is the central point of his work *Laughing Boy* (1945) that won him the Pulitzer Prize for literature in 1930. Robert Fischer studied cartoons of Indians and concluded them as "dumb, drunken, dirty and degraded" (Kent, p. 78) and bound to extinction for their alcoholism, tobacco, dependence on welfare and *primitivism*. This is how anthropology, collections of Native American stories, film, photography, popular novels, and official prize awarding institutions showed unity in construction of a discursive truth about the pseudo-authentic America Indian culture that had nothing to do with

modern Native American daily life. Vine Deloria, Jr. exposes this misrepresentation and cultural distortion in ironic expression: “Not even Indians can relate themselves to this type of creature who to anthropologists is the ‘real’ Indian” (Deloria, p. 82).

### **The Song of Hiawatha**

“The Song of Hiawatha” by Longfellow is a poem of 21 cantos about achievements and sufferings of Ojibway hero Hiawatha. It is the first poetic contribution by a white poet that focuses on the Amerindian mythology, epistemology, and socio-political situation, though now its critical acceptance has waned for its sentimentalization of the Native American culture. Hiawatha’s birth was foretold as harbinger of peace for the warring tribes. Hiawatha was the name of the Indian chief who played a central role in the formation of the Iroquois Confederacy but the character has been developed on the pattern of Terenyawago and Manabozoho, legendary figures of the Iroquois and the Algonquin. He is born to Wenonah, the Virgin made pregnant by Mudjekeewis, the west-wind god, who abandons her to die and Hiawatha is brought up by Nokomis, his grandmother. His character has been constructed on a mini-epic design in consonance with the spirit of the people and the cultural and epistemological life they had been living for centuries along the shoreline of Lake Superior, present day Michigan.

Unrealistic romanticism of the poem lies in brave but pacifist Hiawatha’s acceptance of and welcome to the white priest who reaches the Ojibways to spread Christianity and put an end to the Native culture. Instead of struggling against the scattering of his tribe, he accepts the change and leaves for the land of the north-west wind. Longfellow presents the *relationship* of Hiawatha with his people and with the whites that suits the Euroamericans, not the Native American culture. Ironically the Natives have been fighting for the preservation of their culture and ownership of their lands but Hiawatha has been constructed to refute the history of his people. The Euroamerican political agenda is obvious:

I beheld our nations scattered  
Weakened , warring with each other;  
Saw the remnants of our people  
Sweeping westward, wild and woeful,  
Like the cloud-rack of a tempest,  
Like the withered leaves of Autumn!

(Hiawatha, Stanza XXI, L. 87-95)

### **Leatherstocking Tales**

James Fenimore Cooper is a romantic novelist better known for the *Leatherstocking Tales*, the five novels with Natty Bumppo as the hero. These five romances, alphabetically and in terms of Bumppo’s age, are: *The*

*Deerslayer* (1841), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Pathfinder* (1840), *The Pioneers* (1823), and *The Prairie* (1827). The protagonist, the child of Rousseau, has been developed around goodness of Nature and civilization as a corruptive influence. Raised in the context of Indians, he has the highest qualities of Christianity and civilization.

Cooper's prejudiced representation finds expression in two ways. As Balzac has observed, *The Deerslayer* "idealizes the magnificent scenery of America" (Klibbe, p. 11) and consistently mis-portrays the Indians (Mingos). Cooper does not explore the Indian background, history and customs in *The Deerslayer* or in any of the other *Leatherstocking Tales* keeping them in the margin of the text with occasional degrading references. For instance, Hurry Harry and Natty Bumppo, though not always in agreement, are in alliance because of the fear of invasion by Mingos (Indians). Further in the narrative, Bumppo and a Mingo claim the same canoe. The former convinces the latter about the rightful ownership of the canoe and turns away. Later when he finds the Mingo preparing to shoot, he (Bumppo) fatally shoots him. Mingo comes out as a deceiver and Bumppo treats the dying Mingo respectably and does not scalp him. The Mingos recognize him to be a greater and better warrior and entitle him Hawkeye. The name Hawkeye was given currency partly by Hawkeye, a character in *The Last of the Mohicans* by James Fenimore Cooper. Uncas, a friend of the Delawares, and the Native American hero of the novel is given this title for his never failing sight. Attribution of the term for a character that fights against Indians is opposite to the Indian sensibility. Dr. Klibbe points out the misportrayal of the Indians in this novel in these words:

These five Indians (Le Loup Cervier, Le Sumac, Briarthorn, Catamount, and the Panther) – all enemies of Deerslayer – resemble each other in their treacherous, cruel behavior and their lack of loyalty to the code of the Indians . . . the depiction of these bloodthirsty and villainous inhabitants of the New World helps to explain in part the author's reception abroad. The Europeans saw in (these) portraits of Mingos, a new and very different side to the American experience. The code of these five Indians has no favorable side, no interest in chivalric manners. (p. 83)

### **Misrepresentation through Media Discourse**

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, popular stage performances of minstrel and music represented the Jewish, African and Native Americans as exotic others. This misrepresentation in popular entertainment through vaudeville shows, fairs, circus, and zoos is "spectacle ethnography" in Lori Jirousek's phrase. Later, the three communities were racialized through films as a 'question' or a 'problem' to be solved. Walter Benn Michaels

argues that America in this period (i.e. 19<sup>th</sup> century) excluded non-whites to define itself as a racialized family (Kent, p. 11). Hollywood movies beginning with *The Last of the Mohicans*, the first film on the Native Americans based upon James Fennimore Cooper's novel, televised a Euro-centric essentialized timeless image of the Native Americans thus proving Hollywood to be the second worst enemy of the Native Americans after the US government itself. Negative picturization of the Native Americans as Tontos, romanticized, de-contextualized 'noble savage,' and conquered people dates back to the 1890s. Alexie calls it "the destructive influence of technology" in his essay "White men can't drum." The deplorable trend continues through *The Vanishing American* (1925), representing White racism and actualizing President Andrew Jackson's words "Kill the Indian and save the man" and the concept of *Manifest Destiny*. *The Silent Enemy* (1930) and *The Plainsman* (1936) depict the Natives as a nearly extinct race. *Stage Coach* (1939) represents them as a brutal, blood thirsty race making no positive contribution to the human race. In *Stage Coach*, a white man prefers to kill a white lady rather than leave her to the cannibals. It is one of the most damaging films for Indian identity and history. *They Died with Their Boots On* (1941) sustained the trend of dehumanizing Indians by showing how a white business man manipulates them, and is killed in revenge. *Fort Apache* (1948) also demonstrates the idea of Manifest Destiny and the superiority of the white race. *The Searchers* (1956) stereotypes them as savages and denies their existence even and *The Born Losers* (1967) depicts the Natives as a race born to lose and suffer in terms of land as well as culture and identity. *Little Big Man* (1970) presents Indians as a subjugated community whose individuals cannot perform the role of protagonist whereas *A Man Called Horse* (1970) shows that uncivilized Indians cannot live without the guidance of the whites. Sherman Alexie challenges the televised image of Native Americans. He transformed *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* into the visual narration of *Smoke Signals* (1998) in response to *Dances with the Wolves* (1990).

The vanishing Native American construct continues to raise its head in official policies as well as popular culture. *Dances with Wolves* was a popular movie that appeared as late as 1990 in which the popular myth of the vanishing Indian reemerges. In this movie, Lt. John Dunbar is appointed at his own request to a remote outpost in the Dakota Territory during the American Civil War. He earns the Natives' respect by befriending Indians and wolves, and sheds his white ways but is rendered unfit for military duties (Berglund & Roush, p. 78). The Sioux tribe names him "Dances with Wolves" and he falls in love with "Stands with a Fist," a white girl brought up by the Natives. The names are significant because they reflect the Native tradition of naming. Befriending a wolf is representation of the Native

American culture in a frozen fixity. The Natives have been changing but popular culture represents them in an essentialized image.

*Dances with Wolves* received mixed responses from Native Americans. Floyd Red Crow Westerman (Dakota) and Tantoo Cardinal (Metis/Cree) appreciated it. Cardinal observed that it was “an immense breakthrough in Hollywood’s perception of native people” (Cox, p. 78) whereas Ward Churchill condemns it because it perpetuates and re-asserts “the racist mythology so important to conventional justifications for America’s winning of the west” (Cox, p. 78). American violence against natives is central to Native historical truth but exclusion of this factor evades the issue of who was responsible for the devastation of the Native communities. Louis Owens (Choctaw and Cherokee) interprets the film as an imperialist apology:

Two Socks is a metaphor for the submission of natural America to the “white god” – as Blake repeatedly calls Lieutenant Dunbar – who has come to stake his colonial claim to the territory. Two Socks foreshadows the submission of the Lakotas to the same white god, and wolf and Indian serve to authorize the European invader’s rightful dominion over the continent and its occupants. (Owens, p. 114)

The focus stays on the hero who liberates his white partner from Native captivity. The *civilization is rescued* and the Lakotas are left waiting for their doom while American colonial enterprise is re-enacted. Cox seconds Owens’ critique and about *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992), *Thunderheart* (1992), *Geronimo: An American Legend* (1993), *Last of the Dogmen* (1995), *Natural Born Killers* (1994), *The Scarlet Letter* (1995), *Pocahontas* (1995), *From Dusk Till Dawn* (1996), and *U-Turn* (1997), he observes that these films “repackage narratives of conquest and rearticulate apologies for colonialism for a 1990s audience” (Cox, p. 80).

*Smoke Signals* is resistant exposition of the stereotypical misrepresentation of the Native American subject. The basic plot of the narrative is: Victor Joseph and Thomas-Builds-a-Fire travel to Arizona to recover Victor’s father’s ashes. The three roles are respectively played by Adam Beech (Ojibwa), Evan Adams (Coast Salish) and Gary Farmer (Cayuga). All the central roles are performed by Natives and this is very significant: contrary to the original Native characters, “[t]o construct cinematic Indians, non-Native filmmakers relied on visible ethnic markers, such as artificially browned skin, feathers, paint, and buckskin that reduced Native identities and cultures to a code of signs easily translatable by a non-Native audience” (Cox, p. 74). Hence *Smoke Signals* is highly symbolic in

two ways: Native roles are performed by Natives and the story is symbolic since recovery of the ashes of the dead father is the life-long project of Alexie and synchronizes with the Natives' attitude to forefathers. The conversation between Victor and Thomas is very suggestive: Victor asks how many times he had seen *Dances with Wolves*. In his response to the question that he has seen it almost two hundred times, Victor satirizes Thomas that the movie is not authentic portrayal of Indians and that he does not know how to be a real Indian: "Ha, jeez, you have seen it that many times, haven't you? Man. Do you think that shit is real? God. Don't you even know how to be a real Indian?" (Alexie, *Smoke Signals*, p. 61). Rennard Strickland (Osage & Cherokee) clarifies the issue of media image: "This question of media image is significant for Native Americans. It transcends entertainment. It influences law. It dominates resource management. The media profoundly impacts every aspect of contemporary American Indian policy and shapes both the cultural view of the Indian as well as Indian self-image" (as cited in Berglund, p. 87).

### **Bible on Imperialism**

The Puritans used the Bible for their imperialistic adventure. "Ask of me, and I shall give thee, the heather for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possessions" (Psalms, 2:8). And even Romans provides justification for the plunder: "Whoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation" (13:2). This is the attitude that develops Vine Deloria Jr.'s sense of the death of God in America and in response to this exploitative theology the comically serious Native American response was: "Hey – God is Red – She isn't dead" (Deloria, p. viii). In contrast with the failure of White America's Christian conscience, the Native view of God – Mother Earth God – is ever fresh, benevolent and blessing.

### **Adamic Myth and the New World as Woman**

The diversity of racial complexions of the Natives of the hemisphere, the climate's consequent diversity of fauna and flora disrupts the Biblical story of single human origin. 'Adam' was employed by Europe to impose restricted racial unity upon human diversity. Carolyn Merchant exposes the violent implications of the Adamic myth:

This prelapsarian Adam's Eve would eventually fall once Europeans discovered the unruly wildness of the New World, since the rawness of the hemispheric world only further inspired the attempt to tame nature into a recovered Eden, brought back into the catenation of western history. Consequently, the colonial machine would

produce a refurbished “Mother Eve” or Nature as an improved garden, a nurturing earth bearing fruit (Merchant, p. 137)

Peter Hulme comments that the common image of woman for America symbolically transforms the land into “a naked and visually accessible woman’s body” (p. xii) available for the white consciousness to assault and impregnate and enjoy. The Old World for the English was a repressive social order for the poor and the New World became a promised land, a new Eden. Berkhofer describes how the Puritans constructed the images of Natives to suit their colonial agenda:

. . . those who fled from England to the shores of North America believed they had founded just such a holy commonwealth as God wished. The Native Americans, therefore, held meaning for Puritans in terms of larger drama and the vision of their place in it . . . When the Indian helped the early settlers in New England, he became an agent of the Lord sent to succor the Puritan devout; when he fought or frightened the Puritan, he assumed the aspect of his master Satan and became his agent. (p. 81)

US President, Ronald Regan showed his support of the colonial mind-set during an interview when he was contesting for presidency. Peter Nabokof reports that Regan was asked what famous lives he would wish to live and Regan admitted that he was “fascinated by those who saw this new world – Cortes, Lewis and Clark, Father Serra – when it was virtually *discovered* by man” (p. 405). From the lowest to the highest strata of Euroamerican life, from religious to political authorities, the *truth of discovery* pervaded so deeply that no one could ever question it or doubt it in favor of those who had been living here, according to recent estimate, for 28000 years with rich multiplicity of cultures and languages.

## **Conclusion**

Native Americans were the ‘objects’ to be constituted and this was the only share on their part in the construction of ‘truth’ about them that they were incorrigible primitive cannibals. The other three elements of Foucauldian construction – the places of speaking, the concepts involved in the formation of discourse, and the themes and theories they develop – were beyond their ken. The authorities, whether they were Hollywood film producers, or teachers at colleges and universities, religious authorities or theoretical authorities – like Franz Boas – all came of Euroamerican context and were, therefore, unable to think outside white discursivity. It is not that Native Americans never enjoyed the places of speaking from which statements are enunciated: they had long established tribal systems

wherein they practiced their 'truths' but in face of genocidal effacement of their tribes and cultures, the places of speaking were left only to the whites whose concepts were rooted in the Bible and desire for expansion of their lands and rule. Jesus Christ and the Lord God as ideas proved of immense help to provide a rationale for annihilation of unwanted elements – the Natives. The article provides various facets of colonial discursive machinery that destroyed the Native American race, cultures and languages and it is in this context that Native American literature has been telling *its story* to the dominant society.

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