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Introduction: Now is the Time of the Postindian[1]

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"It is time to change the dialogue about Indians," says Elizabeth Cook Lynn in an interview. The writer, poet, scholar, educator and journal editor, Lynn, continues: "We are not just warriors, we are not just victims of massacre, we are not just drunks in the street, we are not just Americans, we are Indian Americans, Native Americans" (Lynn 2013). She states that there are many stereotypes about Indians, but that these should change because Indians have made great progress, and accomplished a great deal, over the centuries. There are Native American scholars, writers, lawyers and doctors. Specifically, Lynn mentions Charles Eastman who was a physician and the only doctor at Wounded Knee. She also notes Black Elk, a man of philosophy and religion; the painter Oscar Howe, whose works hang in embassies all over the world; and Vine Deloria, Jr., who has written over thirty books on Native American Studies, law, politics, and history.

Native American activist, scholar and writer Gerald Vizenor is another important contemporary figure. Vizenor does not like to be labeled "Indian" because the term is a "colonial invention of victimry," and he prefers to be called a "Postindian." He fervently rejects the white generalizing classification of indigenous peoples as "Indians." In fact, he defines the word "Indian" "as a misnomer, a mistake in navigation. 'The Indian' is a simulation, not an actual reference to real people and cultures. Several thousand Native cultures, and hundreds of contemporary Native languages, have been reduced to a single word, 'Indian'" (Vizenor, "American Indian Art," 51). Thus, according to Vizenor, Indians are fake. They are not real people but "simulations created by whites to complete intellectually the genocidal terrorism they have practiced so enthusiastically since 1492" (Kroeber 27). In *Manifest Manners: Narratives of Postindian Survivance*, Vizenor claims

that "Indians" never existed since "the word has no referent in tribal languages or cultures" (11). Consequently, today, postindians are still fighting colonial misrepresentation and colonization. Although Native Americans are not being destroyed as systematically as in the past, colonization continues in the present day in different forms. They are still oppressed, struggling to hold onto their culture, traditions, values, and languages. Their battle against assimilation also continues.

Misconception has marked the existence of Native Americans from the very beginning in terms of their naming; the erasure of their rich, complex tribal languages and traditions; and the dismissal of their future. Since the colonial era, historians, writers and politicians have cemented the idea that they were a dying nation. Thomas Jefferson, James Fenimore Cooper, Francis Parkman and George Bancroft have, like many others, used rhetoric that almost guaranteed the future extinction of Native Americans. As Larzer Ziff has expressed, they treated "living Indians as sources for a literary construction of a vanished way of life rather than as members of a vital continuing culture. Such writers used words to replace rather than to represent Indian reality" (qtd. in Vizenor, *Manifest Manners,* 8). Thus, the myth of the "vanishing Indian" has always been embedded in the American fabric.

Vizenor first used the term "survivance" in *Manifest Manners* and extended his discussion in *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*. Originally an English word that was synonymous with survival, survivance became obsolete in the nineteenth century (Kroeber 25). As Kroeber explains, Vizenor excavated the term "to subordinate survival's implications of escape from catastrophe and marginal preservation; *survivance* subtly reduces the power of the destroyer. He seizes on *survivance*'s older sense of *succession*, orienting its connotations not toward loss but renewal and continuity into the future rather than memorializing the past" (25).

Vizenor makes a distinction between survival and survivance, which is more complex. He defines survivance as "an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name….Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy and victimry" (Vizenor, *Manifest Manners,* vii). Survivance is the opposite of victimry, which embraces the conventional stereotypical images of Native peoples. It means survival plus resistance, or survival plus endurance. Moreover, an act of survivance is an

indigenous form of self-expression, in any medium, that tells a story about the Native American presence in today's world, while prompting social change by transforming attitudes and beliefs. Thus, survivance stories are creative acts of resistance to domination, oppression and termination. Victimhood, on the other hand, is never productive.

In his article "American Indian Art and Literature Today: Survivance and Tragic Wisdom," Vizenor also claims that "Native Americans have been consigned to the tragic mode of stoical, isolated and tragic victim in art and literature" (47). Through his works, Vizenor tries to heal his people by changing their biased view of themselves. He believes that if Native Americans can reject white definitions of themselves as victims, they can also prevent being destroyed psychologically. As Kroeber explains,

> Survivance rejects this imposed internalizing; it offers natives modes of personal and social renewal attained through welcoming unpredictable cultural reorientations. These reorientations promise radically to transform current native life without requiring abandonment of the enduring value of their precontact cultural successes. (25)

In the interview "Postindian Warriors: Creating a New Consciousness in Native America," Vizenor discusses postindian warriors. These people, who have survived the worst possible circumstances, do not write about victimry, but about survivance, Luther Standing Bear (Plenty Kill) (1868-1939), a traditional Sioux, is a "postindian warrior" who refused victimhood. Luther Standing Bear was one of the first students to attend the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania, which aimed at "whitemanizing" Indian children, but unlike so many others, he returned home. Away from the warmth of their families and the security of their villages, Indian children suffered in the unfamiliar environment, where they had to abide by the strict rules of the boarding school. Upon arrival, their hair was cut, and their clothes and blankets were replaced by uniforms. They were forced to assimilate and were required to convert to Christianity and abandon their Native languages. Harsh military discipline was administered, and those who did not obey the rules were punished severely. The motto of the institution became "Kill the Indian and Save the Man" (Nies 291).

While most Native American children had great difficulty adjusting to the completely alien environment, Standing Bear survived

and became determined to return to his people. At school, he picked the English name Luther, as he was told to do from the list on the blackboard, and became Luther Standing Bear in government records. Despite the circumstances, he endured bravely and was more fortunate than most. After completing his education, he taught at the government school on the Rosebud Reservation, and was praised for being "diligent and faithful, persevering and trustworthy" and very "competent." He later worked as a government clerk, opened a store on his reservation, became an assistant minister, and finally joined Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show and traveled to Europe. At a time when an Indian author was a rarity, Luther Standing Bear wrote works such as *My People: The Sioux* and *Land of the Spotted Eagle*, and told his story of survivance in public lectures. He not only informed white readers of his people's way of life, but also aroused white sympathy for Indians during difficult times. Luther Standing Bear clearly defied victimization and embodies Vizenor's definition of a "postindian warrior."

Born in 1958 and known as the first Diné (Navaho) surgeon, Lori Aviso Alvord is an example of a more contemporary postindian. Her autobiography, *The Scalpel and the Silver Bear,* is an account of how she combined western medicine and traditional healing to treat her patients. In the introduction, she states:

> This book is about my journey and my struggles. From my own mistakes, my own initial misadventures in patient care, I realized that although I was a good surgeon, I was not always a good healer. I went back to the healers of my tribe to learn what a surgical residency could not teach me. From them I have heard a resounding message: Everything in life is connected. Learn to understand the bonds between humans, spirit and nature. Realize that our illness and our healing alike come from maintaining strong and healthy relationships in every aspect of your life. (Alvord and Van Pelt 3)

Dr. Alvord's story is a story of success, as she was able to merge the latest innovations in the medical world with ancient tribal ways to cure her patients. Through her autobiography, she was able to recount her experiences and challenge invented notions of Indianness and stereotypes such as the noble savage, the fierce warrior, and "leathered-and-feathered vanishing race." As Alvord illustrates, Native

Americans have not only survived, but have also resisted colonial misrepresentation through an active sense of presence.

This issue of the *Journal of American Studies of Turkey*, which will explore postindians and survivance, is the second dedicated to Native Americans. It consists of six essays, a book review, and an interview. In the first essay, "Only the Earth Shall Endure," Valerian Three Irons discusses the history of his people, and how they have survived over 500 years of attempted assimilation, genocide, oppression, imperialism, invasion and capitalism. He emphasizes that in order to find solutions to the current problems of indigenous people, the stereotypical romanticized view of Native Americans should be abandoned and they should be seen in the present for who they are. Lawrence B. Goodheart's article, "A Reflection on the 1637 Mystic Fort Massacre in Connecticut," recounts the horrific massacre of the Pequot in detail, and draws attention to the difference between Indian and European warfare. Extensive killing was characteristic of European wars, while Indian wars could last several years, but only a few would die. The third article, "Reinventing the Writing of American Indian History in the Twenty-first Century," by Daniele Fiorentino, investigates the difficulty of studying Native American history, which requires an interdisciplinary approach that relies on approximation.

Özge Özbek Akıman's article, "Edward Dorn's Idea of the Native American and His 'Curious Paleface' Consciousness in *The Shoshoneans*" examines Dorn's photo-essay, or documentary prose, *The Shoshoneans: The People of the Basin Plateau,* as an early critique of race, culture and subjectivity from a geo-historical perspective. The fifth article, Nichole S. Prescott's "Building Native Women's Leadership through Community and Culture," explores the evolving nature and perception of Native American women's leadership through the lenses of colonialism and gender. It explains how today, Native American women are gradually regaining the sociopolitical power they once exercised in the past. The last article, Cem Kılıçarslan's article, "The Reel Indian or The Real Indian?: The Three Modes of Representation of Native Americans in Western Movies" deals with three different modes of representation, or marketing strategies, that depend on Hollywood demand. It argues that the cinematic image of the Native American cannot depict historical reality, for it is shaped by motives that differ from those of Native Americans. Finally, Ece Soydam's interview on the prize-winning documentary *On the Trail of Sitting Bull*

presents the Native American perspective on the Bering Strait theory, assimilation, racism, genocide and expresses their hopes for the future. When asked what they would want Turkish people to know about the Lakota, most answered: "That we are alive!"

When I went to Albuquerque, New Mexico in 1993 as a Fulbright scholar pursuing my interest in Native Americans, I was introduced to the historian Joe S. Sando from Jemez Pueblo. He was the author of *Pueblo Nations: Eight Centuries of Pueblo Indian History,* and he signed his book saying, "Let your people know that we still exist," which I have taken as my mission. Since then, I have presented papers, published articles and organized conferences on Native Americans. This issue of *JAST* is the result of two conferences organized by the Department of American Culture and Literature at Hacettepe University. If it had not been for the Turkish Coalition of America, we would not have been able to host these events. Therefore, I owe a special thanks to Lincoln McCurdy, who was President of the TCA at the time, for sponsoring our Native American speakers and enabling us to organize the very first conference on Native Americans in Turkey. I am likewise indebted to Visiting Fulbright Professors David Espey and Lawrence Goodheart who inspired me to study Native Americans and guided and supported me throughout my career. I would also like to express my gratitude to the peer reviewers, the issue contributors, and my colleagues for their encouragement as I finalized this long-delayed project. I thank Tanfer Emin Tunç, whose help has been invaluable; the former editor of *JAST*, Özlem Uzundemir; our present editors, Defne Ersin Tutan and Selen Aktari Sevgi; the ASAT Executive Board; my former student, Ata Can, for designing the poster for the first conference, which now serves as the basis for the cover of this issue; and last but not least, Merve Özman, without whose assistance I could not have fulfilled my mission.

Notes

[1] Parts of this introduction are from a previously published essay: Meldan Tanrısal, "From Tradition to Survivance: PostIndians Narrating Survivance and Resistance." *Traditions and Transitions*, Vol. II, pp. 250-263. Eds. E. Slavova, et al. Sofia UP, 2019. Used with permission.

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