Out of the Melting Pot, Into the Nationalist Fires: Native American Literary Studies in Europe

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Abstract
This essay addresses four methodological approaches to Native Literary Studies that dominate in the European academic context: national (though not tribal nationalist), multi-ethnic, universal, and postcolonial. European scholars of Native American Literary Studies often find themselves grappling with methodological issues that lie between the twin nationalist claims of a generalizing and potentially assimilative “American Studies” approach and a Native American literary nationalist approach, like that outlined by Robert Warrior, Jace Weaver, and Craig Womack in their ground-breaking book American Indian Literary Nationalism (2006). It is to these claims that my title gestures, while referencing Elizabeth Cook-Lynn’s important observation that frequently representations of Native Americans in the literary canon, in the teaching of Native American Literature, and in scholarly publications, are used as “the basis for the cynical absorption into the ‘melting pot’, pragmatic inclusion in the canon, and involuntary unification of an American literary voice” (Why I Can’t Read Wallace Stegner and Other Essays, 96). The […]

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It is difficult to overestimate the differences between Native American Studies in Europe and the US. Here, there are no dedicated university programs in Native American Studies; disciplinary units such as American Studies or departments such as English, History, Development Studies, or Anthropology house teaching and research programs in Native Studies. The institutional conditions under which Native Literary Studies takes place in a European context give rise to four primary methodological approaches which I address below: national (though not tribal nationalist), multi-ethnic, universal, and postcolonial. European scholars of Native American Literary Studies often find themselves grappling with methodological issues that lie between the twin nationalist claims of a generalizing and potentially assimilative “American Studies” approach and a Native American literary nationalist approach, like that outlined by Robert Warrior, Jace Weaver, and Craig Womack in their ground-breaking book *American Indian Literary Nationalism* (2006). It is to these claims that my title gestures, while referencing Elizabeth Cook-Lynn's important observation that frequently representations of Native Americans in the literary canon, in the teaching of Native American Literature, and in scholarly publications, are used as “the basis for the cynical absorption into the 'melting pot', pragmatic inclusion in the canon, and involuntary unification of an American literary voice” (1996, 96).1 The category of “Native” is effectively “melted” into another category of cultural experience – with the attendant loss of indigenous identities, historical experiences, and claims to justice -- whether this is the universalizing canon of “Literature” per se, or more specifically a national American (settler) Literature; a national canon of minority “multi-ethnic” Literature that fails to distinguish adequately between indigenous and migrant literary production; or a transnational “postcolonial” canon. As Wolfgang Hochbruck predicted back in 1991: “creating new reservations for minority literatures would eventually create new problems” (51). It would seem that this problematic time has come. Consequently, Cook-Lynn's insight guides my critique here of some of the directions in which Native American Literary Studies is currently moving in Europe.

If the term “Native” is a simulated category that brings together under an homogenizing banner the rich diversity of Native tribal cultures, so too is the term “Europe.” Much of what I have to say about the current state of Native American Studies in Europe is focused upon the UK and on scholarship written in English. Dynamic research cultures in the field of Native Studies flourish across continental Europe, in very different institutional and non-academic contexts. A long history of “Indianism” or Native American “hobbyism,” for example, helps to promote Native American Studies in countries like Germany, Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Russia, Scandinavia, and Finland. Additionally, Europe is, and has been, an important international forum for Native artists, scholars, and activists. Native people have, of
course, been visiting Europe since the sixteenth century. As Naila Clerici reminds us, “Native Peoples know the importance of being heard abroad: in Europe they find an audience fascinated by their cultures and rarely biased for economic or political reasons” (2002, 7). Clerici may be overstating the claim to political acceptance; Joëlle Rostkowski, in her account of the failure of Deskaheh, the Cayuga Chief of the Iroquois Confederacy, to garner international recognition of the conflict between his community and the Canadian nation-state, underlines the refusal of the League of Nations to acknowledge his tribal nation as a sovereign state engaged in an international conflict with another sovereign state (Canada). However, Rostkowski concludes her account with the reminder:

Deskaheh paved the way for future generations. The interest in international organizations that Native Americans have demonstrated goes back to the first contacts he established within the League of Nations. In the 1930s, an Iroquois delegation went back to Geneva and was again disappointed by the result of its visit. But some Ho-De-No-Sau-Nee remained convinced that international organizations could be of some assistance to Indians. The Iroquois were among the first tribes who expressed an interest in the United Nations and, in 1949, they sent a delegation to the opening of the UN building in New York (1995, 4).

The establishment of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations at the United Nations in Geneva in 1982 and the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 have helped to mute questions concerning the representativity of Native delegations and tribal claims to sovereignty. But this ambiguity regarding tribal sovereignty and Native nationalism continues to form an important part of the complex institutional context within which Native Studies is structured in Europe.

In European universities, Native American Literature is most commonly embedded in an English Department and taught by a single full Professor of English or American Literature. Less often, it is taught in the context of folkloric or anthropological studies as something like la civilisation amérindienne, where the focus is on religion and cultural praxis on the one hand, and translations and interviews, on the other. Though there is no clear geographical distinction, the latter is generally the case in countries like Italy and France, the former is more the case in northern European countries such as the UK, Germany, and Switzerland. There are, as I have already noted, no European departments or programs for Native American Studies, and no degrees outside a degree in American Studies with an emphasis on Native American Studies. The exception to this is the offerings in Saami Studies (focusing on language and culture) offered by universities in Finland and Sweden. This dearth of integrated programs means that professors are appointed with no special regard for their ability to teach Native American Studies; indeed, an ability to “teach across” a disciplinary canon is what is valued. So it is only by luck that Native American Studies is taught in certain universities and it is by luck that it is taught at all. Consequently, graduate students working in the field of Native American Studies are scattered across the continent, working under the guidance of individual professors and perhaps not knowing of each other and their work.

This is not to say that there are no opportunities for professional networking in Europe. The American Indian Workshop (http://www.american-indian-workshop.org/), grew out of a workshop conducted at the European Association for American Studies (EAAS) conference in 1980 and has been directed by Christian Feest since then. The American Indian Workshop continues to publish the European
Review of Native American Studies, which was inaugurated in 1987, and hosts an annual conference where European scholars of Native American Studies can meet, though this is a very international conference with many delegates from the US. This conference reflects the diverse interests of the membership but tends to emphasize issues of greatest interest to museum-curators and historians, anthropologists and ethnologists, rather than cultural scholars – this was made very apparent at the 2007 conference, hosted at the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris, and devoted to the twin themes of “Native Americans and Museums” and “Collections and Artifacts from Eastern North America prior to 1800.

The opportunity to share research projects at an early stage, particularly for graduate students and early career researchers, outside the formal environment of the professional conference is made available by the annual Geneva Native Studies Master Class. This event brings together less experienced scholars with a prominent international senior scholar (such as Jace Weaver, Gerald Vizenor, Aileen Moreton-Robinson) to meet each other, share projects, and receive advice by drawing on the collective expertise of the group. This event complements the annual “Work in Progress” colloquium hosted by the Native Studies Research Network in the UK, which also offers a forum for the sharing of current projects. Participation in this event is open to all members, not just those who are starting out, and is structured rather like a one-day conference without a visiting speaker. However, participation is restricted to UK-based scholars. So the two events in the UK and in Geneva overlap but do not compete directly. Networking among scholars who are spread out across all the countries of Europe is an important issue, one that has been eased by these various European initiatives and, significantly, by the establishment of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA), which offers an international network of researchers in the field.

This institutional framework, by contextualizing Native American Literary Studies in certain disciplinary ways, encourages particular kinds of research and teaching, the essence of which can be summarized in the quotation from Elizabeth Cook-Lynn cited above. She argues that “Much modern fiction written in English by American Indians is being used as the basis for the cynical absorption into the 'melting pot', pragmatic inclusion in the canon, and involuntary unification of an American literary voice” (1996, 96). Absorption, inclusion, unification: these are the workings of the multicultural “melting pot” but Cook-Lynn is not writing about multiculturalism as such. She is pointing to the involuntary incorporation – the assimilation into the national body politic – of Native literary cultures into the corpus of the US national canon at the expense of Native heritage, community, and identity, and for the benefit of a simulated unified national image of “the United States.”

This involuntary participation in a falsely unified American literary voice is the consequence of the ways in which Native literary texts are embedded in the US literary canon (instantiated in American Literature anthologies, such as the popular Heath and Norton teaching anthologies) and the marginal inclusion of Native writers in American literary histories. Anthologies and literary histories that represent the development of US literary culture in a narrative that focalizes the story through the experiences of and texts written by immigrant-settlers are typical of the kind of material presented to students as the disciplinary framework within which Native American Literature is to be read and understood. Early Native American Literature is treated ethnographically (as myths which could just as well be labeled “stories” or “narratives,” without the anthropological implications of “myth”) while later texts are treated as adjuncts to canonical works of American Literature (including immigrant African, Asian, Hispanic, Jewish, and European texts).
The central problem here is that no distinction is even attempted between migrant literatures and indigenous literatures. But this distinction is, in fact, the elephant in the room that no-one wants to address in discussions of how Native American Literature should be presented in the syllabus. I will come back to this later, but let me say this now: Craig Womack's argument that Native American Literature is "American Literature" and that all other literary production in the US must be seen as an adjunct to Native American Literature, which is a radical suggestion given the current European disciplinary scene, seems to me to point the way forward to a more satisfactory and just representation of the originary status of Native American cultures and, also, of the canon of American settler-nation texts. But in the standard teaching references (literary histories and anthologies) Native American Literature is represented as one thread within the developmental, and often triumphal, narrative of American Literary History that culminates in the emergence of the US-as-global superpower.

The marginalization of Native America within this narrative, temporally and thematically, promotes a "representations" approach to Native American history and communities. In the absence of a substantial corpus of Native texts, students find themselves directed to European representations of Native Americans. This is especially the case in the colonial and early Republican periods. The central place accorded to migrant literatures – they are the subject, Natives are the object – promotes and is reflected in a widespread interest in European perceptions of Native peoples. So, moving away from literature for a moment, we have Mick Gidley's work on Edward Curtis and Hartwig Isernhagen's on Karl Bodmer. The focus is on Europeans studying Europeans as they studied Native peoples. This is not necessarily a bad thing, especially when the work is directed towards uncovering the manipulations by which European artists, like Curtis and Bodmer, created and sustained misleading and demeaning stereotypes of indigenous peoples. The problem is that Europeans are placed in the center of the scene; the spectacle of Europeans studying Europeans through the lens of Native Americans. This is not necessarily a bad thing, especially when the work is directed towards uncovering the manipulations by which European artists, like Curtis and Bodmer, created and sustained misleading and demeaning stereotypes of indigenous peoples. The problem is that Europeans are placed in the center of the scene; the spectacle of Europeans studying Europeans through the lens of Native Americans should and does benefit Europeans to advance their historical self-knowledge but does not benefit the object of this scholarly effort. To the contrary, a "representations" approach continues to validate the historical narrative of US triumphalism. Markku Henriksson, who for eighteen years was the chairman of the American Indian Association of Finland, a hobbyist club, is quoted as writing, "In Europe … different 'Indian clubs' have been founded in which feather bonnets and skin dresses are worn. But it is of no use to the poor, if the rich wear rags; to the Cheyenne, if Finns live in tepees; to the Hopi, if a German makes kachina dolls. … Ethnologists, anthropologists, and archeologists have founded research groups and scientific societies for studying the history and cultures of the Indians … But the interest in the dead Indians has not helped the Indians still alive" (trans. and quoted in Hämäläinen, 1998, 15). What I am calling for is a revisionary narrative of American literatures and cultures that would place immigrant writers and their histories as the objects of study and the indigenous point of view at the center as the subject. No longer would we be led to ask, "how did European settlers view Native peoples?" but, shifting the ethnographic gaze to the settlers, "how did Native communities respond to and engage with European colonist-invaders?" The shift in emphasis underlines the particular status of Native communities as indigenous, first nations – a status that is erased by the incorporation of Native cultural production into the hegemonic national narrative of the US.

The erasure of indigenous status is the consequence of both an “American Literature” approach to Native writing and also a second kind of research that dominates in Europe. This is the “multi-ethnic” approach to which Elizabeth Cook-Lynn gestures when she refers to the “cynical absorption [of Native American
Literature] into the 'melting pot': the lumping together of various "multiethnic" literatures, in the style of the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the US (MELUS) or the Society for Multi-Ethnic Studies in Europe and the Americas (MESEA: the organization that started life as MELUS Europe). In the Afterword to the volume of papers from the first MESEA conference, one of the founders Bill Boelhower (then of the University of Padua in Italy, now of Louisiana State University) writes of the conference: “The event, of course, was the first step towards the creation of a new European association dedicated to the study of the many ethnic cultures and literatures of the United States from the comparative perspective of our own impelling sense of the new multicultural scene in Europe” (Fischer-Hornung & Raphael-Hernandez, 2000, 335). So, in the context of a European Union likened to the "United States of Europe," Boelhower called upon the discipline of American Studies in the US to offer a paradigm for this "new democratic project" and a barometer with which "to gauge the conditions and possibilities of cultural pluralism within the context of shared political rights that such a European community implies" (335). What the volume excludes is -- again -- the elephant in the room where European discussions of ethnicity take place: indigenous peoples. As Boelhower makes clear: “The Heidelberg conference entertained essays not only on O.E.Rolvaag, Bernardino Ciambelli, Saul Bellow, and Cynthia Ozick, but also on Bharati Mukherjee, and any number of contemporary Korean American, Japanese American, and Mexican American writers. African American writers – from Charles Chesnutt and Zora Neale Hurston to Audre Lorde and Gloria Naylor – continued to receive due attention, as did such sweeping themes as the cultural construction of race and the continuing consequences of slavery” (336). But no indigenous writers. The editors acknowledge this absence as “unfortunate serendipity” (xii) but the MESEA conference held ten years later in 2008 in Leiden on the topic “Migration Matters” was an affront to some scholars of Native American Literature who brought to the organizers' attention the fact that of more than seventy panels, only two were devoted to Native American Studies. Despite this absence, the editors of the 2000 conference proceedings began their Introduction in this way:

Since the founding of the United States the discussion of the significance of the numerous ethnicities within its geographical borders has continued unabated. Native Americans, who inhabited the land which was to become the object of desire for generations of Europeans, African Americans, who were ripped from their ancestral Africa to be enslaved, and immigrants from Europe and from throughout the world began a long and difficult struggle over diverse definitions of what it means to be American. This debate has continued with changing emphases as waves of immigrants from differing parts of Europe and increasing immigration from other continents have changed the tonalities and resonance of America as the 'nation of nation[s]' (xi).

Here, Native American Literature is explicitly located within the paradigm of *e pluribus unum*: the distinctive indigenous cultures of the Americas are “melted” into the common pot of US ethnicity. As a consequence of this placement within the hegemonic paradigm, indigenous histories and cultures are incorporated into a US national public culture in which the settler-nation views its own self-image and the national US motto, *e pluribus unum*, is once again validated.

The challenge of books and projects like these is to see white literature as an ethnic artifact of yet another culture among the immigrant cultures of Africans, Asians, and Latinos. Consequently, it is argued, one of the important things that
European scholars can bring to multi-ethnic studies is language – Spanish scholars can and do study the Spanish-language texts written by Latino immigrants. But European scholars cannot bring a native understanding of indigenous languages to the US. Similarly, the privileging of a disciplinary methodology based on “métisage, creolization, liminality, and hybridity” leads one to ask where the emphasis in these mixtures lies? The answer lies in the notion of hybridity, which derives from the cross-breeding of organisms from two different taxonomical categories (so the very idea emphasizes difference) and which, in botanical terms, involves the grafting of one kind of plant called the “scion” (meaning a “descendant”) onto another which forms the “rootstock.” So there is an “original” and a “graft” which produces the hybrid. The question of priority – which comes first, the rootstock or the scion? -- is answered by the very names used to describe the process. The selection of this botanical practice as a model for describing inter-cultural contact therefore creates the object that it wants to study as something that was European once but is now different, “hybrid.” This analogy posits an originary European nativism, like the Spaniard who migrates to the Americas and provides the “rootstock” for those offspring or “scions” who become “Latino/a” or, if “cross-bred” with indigenous peoples, “Chicano/a.” The very terms are offensive; the effect of “Europeanizing” Native America through the racial hybridity analogy is even more so.

I want to return to this issue of priority, but first let me offer another example of what happens when Native literatures are embedded in a “multi-ethnic” paradigm that includes the other “visible minorities” of Asian America, African America, and Chicano/a America. In the Introduction to Beginning American Ethnic Literatures (2001), Maria Lauret observes that “Ethic American fictions, of the kind discussed in subsequent chapters are, then, however culturally distinct, held together by common themes and by modes of representation which highlight the tensions inherent in American national identity” (9). In this claim, and in Martin Padget's chapter on Native American Literature, we can see those operations at work about which Elizabeth Cook-Lynn warns: dropping Native American Literature into an ethnic “melting pot,” incorporating Native American Literature into the American Literary canon, and doing so through what is the obsessive theme of US settler literature: “the tensions inherent in American national identity.” No mention is made here of the distinction between migrant and indigenous identities and histories, no mention of the violent processes by which Native American Literature became the object of the European critical gaze.

The same kind of operation can be seen at work in projects that place Native American Literature not in the context of “ethnic” literatures produced by members of an immigrant racial minority, but in a generalized context of “Literature” that is divorced from external conditions of production. I'm thinking here of Helen May Dennis's 2007 book, Native American Literature: Towards a Spatialized Reading, where she treats Native American Literature narratologically, as if it were like any other literature. Indeed, in her Introduction Dennis (who teaches at the University of Warwick) writes: “I would contend that the effect of Amerindian authors publishing novels in American English is to contribute to 'the enlargement of the universe of human discourse'” (2007, 5). Thus, works of Native American Literature are assimilated into a canon of European literary forms. And Dennis makes it her ultimate goal to show, as she phrases it, “the case for due recognition of its right to inclusion in the broader American literary canon” (2). This fits with Dennis's own scholarly track record: on the book cover she lists her previous work on “Elizabeth Bishop, Willa Cather, H.D., Ezra Pound, Adrienne Rich, medieval Provençal poetry, gender in American literature and culture, and North American women writers”; and the first chapter of Dennis's book does not even mention a single Native name: Adrienne
Rich, Sandra Cisneros, Toni Morrison, Willa Cather – they are all there – but not a single Native writer. What Dennis is doing is constructing a universalizing literary paradigm within which Native American Literature can be placed and against which it can be evaluated.

Narratology would seem to offer an objective and “innocent” critical approach to the European scholar of Native American Literature. However, even in the front matter of the book Dennis's assumptions are acknowledged: “Believing in the possibility of communicating across cultural boundaries, Native American Literature offers a series of readings that focus on the act of understanding imaginatively texts by Native American and mixed-blood authors that address and educate a global readership” (2). There are a number of points worth consideration here. The first is the commitment to cross-cultural communication as if this was a purely aesthetic rather than politicized process. The second is the assumption that reading is an act rather than an object (a reading), a process and not a thing that can be claimed by Native communities. The third is the distinction between Native American and “mixed-blood” authors. Politically, this distinction contributes to the “vanishing” of “Native Americans”; practically, it allows Dennis to treat texts by Native authors as always already a “hybrid” of Native and European heritage. Dennis follows James Ruppert's 1995 book, Mediation in Contemporary Native American Fiction (though she does not acknowledge his work) in which he proposed that Native texts include both an implied Native reader and an implied non-Native reader, two functions of the text that mediate its meanings to different constituencies. Dennis ignores the implied Native reader and focuses instead on relations between a non-Native reader and the Native author: “In the novel the narrated experience of the implicit author enters into dialogue with the imagination of the implicit reader” (5). This kind of publication, which has a leveling effect on the tribal specificity of Native American Literature, is a consequence of embedding Native American Literature in a “Literatures in English” paradigm. This paradigm, however, offers Dennis a way of dealing with the tensions she perceives in her situation as a European scholar dealing with tribal material. She begins her book by confessing:

I would feel dismay if the movement towards establishing intellectual sovereignty for America's First Nations were to preclude me from reading published novels. Common sense tells me that my acts of reading and interpretation contribute to a larger sense of community that implicitly supports the current work of Nativist scholars (4).

The distinct activities of reading Native novels and writing about them is blurred in this passage, erasing the linked issues of the how and why of interpretation. Dennis's slippage between Native and “Nativist” scholars is also revealing because she gets it so wrong. A “Native” scholar, such as those to whom she is referring is an indigenous scholar (for example, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn or Jace Weaver); Nativists are those who are NOT indigenous but are US-born of immigrant backgrounds – so Dennis's work does indeed support that of Euro-American scholars who seek to assimilate Native literary voices into a falsely unified American national voice, but that is not what Dennis has intended to say. What she actually does want to say is confused because “common sense” is neither common nor sensible but is usually the work of a hegemonic process of interpellation – so the “commonsense” that tells her that the reduction of Native American texts to European literary forms in fact supports efforts to promote tribal identities based upon indigenous sovereignty is actually no sense at all. Dennis's book is a profoundly conservative effort to do exactly what Elizabeth Cook-Lynn warns against. Let me remind you of that warning: “Much modern fiction
written in English by American Indians is being used as the basis for the cynical absorption into the 'melting pot', pragmatic inclusion in the canon, and involuntary unification of an American literary voice” (1996, 96).

Helen Dennis voices the contemporary issue that causes European scholars greatest anxiety and that Wendy Rose has described in the following terms: “The fear exists among non-native writers that we are somehow trying to bar them from writing about Indians at all, that Indian people might be 'staking a claim' as the sole interpreters of Indian cultures, most especially of that which is sacred, and asserting that only Indians can make valid observations on themselves” (1992, 415). While Rose denies that these European fears are based in fact, she does raise the twin issues of how and why Native cultures are approached as objects of non-Native knowledge. She discusses the issue of cultural appropriation within the context of what she, following Geary Hobson, calls "whiteshamanism." The term refers to non-Native producers of cultural knowledge who claim a superior insight into Native customs and spirituality and, in this way, contribute to an ongoing process of cultural imperialism. What Rose describes is clearly related to the “manifest manners” that Gerald Vizenor sees as working to eclipse Native epistemologies by replacing indigenous claims to Native realities with colonial simulations of the “Indian.” I would argue that this process of colonial appropriation is what happens when Native American Literature is taught as an “offshoot” of “Literatures in English.”

Perhaps the best known engagement with this issue of cultural appropriation is that offered by Elizabeth Cook-Lynn. She exposes to view the selectivity that is at work when European scholars choose which Native American writers to write about and to teach. There is a relatively small group of writers who appear again and again on European courses and in books written by European scholars. These writers largely coincide with the “canonical” Native American writers named by Cook-Lynn in essays such as “The American Indian Fiction Writer: Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism, the Third World, and First Nation Sovereignty” (1993). The authors she names, and who are largely the preferred subjects of European teaching and research, pursue what she sees as a “between worlds” paradigm of Native identity that colludes with “white American colonialist values”: “The American Indian writers who have achieved successful readership in mainstream America ... move into thinking about Indian populations as simply gatherings of exiles and emigrés and refugees, strangers to themselves and their lands, pawns to in the control of white manipulators, mixed-bloods searching for identity ...” (86).

Louise Erdrich's early fiction, Paula Gunn Allen, Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony, Linda Hogan, Sherman Alexie, even Gerald Vizenor's work can be accounted for in these terms. This is not to say that there is anything intrinsically "wrong" with any of these writers. But it is to say that in the work of these writers European scholars find material to support their own particular interests: whether it is the postmodernist deconstruction of Indian stereotypes in Vizenor's work, or victims of European colonization and US Indian policy in Erdrich and Hogan and even Silko. Helen Dennis privileges Louise Erdrich because “her work at times ... seems closest to European novelistic preoccupations, in her almost Proustian obsession with memory” (4); Paula Gunn Allen is compared favorably with Ralph Ellison, and Silko with Toni Morrison and Alice Walker.

Helen Dennis universalizes in order to escape the false binary that she evokes between tribal separatism and Eurocentrism. This is not a new opposition but it is one that has engaged the concern of European scholars of Native Studies. Perhaps the best known non-Native intervention in this debate is Arnold Krupat's, especially the stark opposition he articulates in Ethnocriticism between translation (telling our non-Native story as the other's) and ventriloquism (speaking for the Native “other”). European
scholars have embraced the prospect of a dialogical negotiation between these two opposed positions, following Bakhtin's concept of dialogism or Homi Bhabha's model of a cosmopolitan “third space” or Helmbrecht Breinig's idea of intercultural “transdifference.” This notion of mediation, of finding a discourse in which European and tribal world views can come together, is obviously appealing to European (and other non-Native) scholars. However, we must come back to the problem of priority and the question concerning who leads the conversation? In a context where, through centuries of white supremacy, European viewpoints inevitably (and, to Europeans, often invisibly) dominate, a conversation or dialogue between equals is not yet possible.

This brings me to the final and perhaps most contentious approach to Native American Literary Studies: Postcolonialism. Now, I am one of those who, some years ago, called for the field of Postcolonial Studies to be extended to include American texts and in particular Native American Literature. My reasoning then was to displace the British Commonwealth focus of much postcolonial study and to emphasize links among Native American, Australian Aboriginal, Maori, and Canadian First Nations peoples. The problem, as I have come increasingly to appreciate, is that colonialism is an immensely complex issue and the experience of Native American tribal communities is possibly the most complex historical case. Native American tribes were not colonized in the same way that the British colonized Australia; the Australian experience is different to the British-Maori treaty-making process in Aotearoa/New Zealand; and US independence from British colonial government produced a neo-colonial settler-state that fundamentally changed relations between settlers and indigenous peoples. But we must ask to what extent those relations were and continued to be “colonial”?

Rebecca Tillett, who teaches American Studies at the University of East Anglia, published in 2007 an introductory study, Contemporary Native American Literature, in the British Association for American Studies (BAAS) series. In this book, she defines “Native Americans as colonised peoples within a colonial state.” She continues: “Contemporary Native American literature emerges directly from this imperial relationship, and from the engagement of Native peoples with the legacy of the federal-Indian relationship within a country that is, paradoxically, both colonial and post-colonial” (1). This emphasis upon colonialism means that it is not long before we are reading about the “between worlds” condition of Native America along with the rhetoric of hybridity and mediation: “many Native writings can be interpreted as part of a long tradition of negotiation and mediation between cultures, and as interventions into established and implicitly racist Euro-American discourses ...” (1). But what does Tillett mean by “colonial”? Certainly not the pre-Republican period, since she begins with Samson Occom's sermon of 1772. Most European scholars work with contemporary Native American Literature; very few venture into the nineteenth century; and almost none treat the colonial period. Why? Perhaps because the “mixed-blood” case becomes more difficult to sustain in the earlier period, as does the effort to assimilate Native American Literature to pan-tribal, ethnic, and US identities. She describes the “concerns of indigenous Americans as colonised peoples” as “the effects of displacement, language loss, enforced Christian conversion, enforced education and the loss of sovereignty” (8) -- but these are effects, not a colonial governmental system. Instead of the term “colonialism” we might refer to the workings of the ideology of Manifest Destiny and the interests of Anglo-Saxon supremacy that it promotes.

Vizenor's concept of “manifest manners,” mentioned above, works as a mode of interpellation or system of everyday gestures that legitimates both the ideology of white supremacy and the practices of erasure of Native tribal cultures and identities.
Throughout his writings, Vizenor uncovers this history of erasure under the banner of the “Indian” that continues to name a simulated racial category. Ironically, dominant white supremacist images of “the authentic Indian” sustain the illusion that only the “Indians” created and promoted by these images are real. However, if “real” Indians are vanishing in favor of mixed-bloods — the cultural mediators and “hybrids” that are the focus of so much European scholarship on Native American Literary Studies -- then this scholarly discourse in fact supports the genocidal interests of white supremacy.

In a powerful and incisive essay on the differences between the terms “ethnic” and “indigenous” Winona Stevenson reminds us of the close historical relationship that exists between the academy and the state:

... the state has considerable investment in representing Indigenous peoples as simply another ethnic group. Liberal democratic nation-states refuse to accommodate distinct societies or special-case populations. ... They make little or no provision for the exercise of rights beyond those provided by legislatures in the form of citizenship. To protect and promote our special rights and interests and resist assimilation, Indigenous peoples should oppose categorization as “just another ethnic group” by government officials [and, I would add, academics as well] (1998, 45).

Stevenson explores the tensions between “Ethnic Studies” and Native or Indigenous Studies in terms of the unequal power relations that exist between an immigrant group that has no originary claim to land or local autonomy and who “have a demonstrated willingness to integrate on terms set by the nation-state” (45). These inequities, she argues, lead to the marginalization and erasure of indigenous status, the unique rights, and the specific sets of issues that are important to Native peoples. I would argue that this is what we see in the field of Native American Literary Studies in Europe, though not exclusively in Europe.

The political and institutional contexts within which Native American Studies is located, in Europe and elsewhere, require that academics acknowledge that the environment of white epistemological imperialism within which we work and expose the ideology of white/Anglo-Saxon supremacy operating within the discourses that remain embedded in European approaches to Native American Literature. Duane Champagne, in his recent overview of American Indian Studies observes that “Although Indigenous studies can draw on the intellectual theories of contemporary scholarly work and traditions, most of that work is done within Western epistemologies and is designed to contribute to human understanding, but to a large extent from a Western point of view” (2008, 77). We need Native-centered literary anthologies and Native-centered literary histories to support pedagogies and research methodologies that refuse to serve the assimilationist agenda of the settler nation-state. We could begin by revising received understandings of what constitutes “Literature” in order to accommodate forms of indigenous cultural expression; this would allow us to and acknowledge and begin to put right the vast destruction of indigenous written materials by early colonizers who sought evidence to support the ideology of Native “savagery” and lack of “civilization” evidenced by the “lack” of “Literature.” We could move further away from the “representations” approaches — Europeans studying Europeans studying Native peoples -- that still dominate much European scholarship on Native American literature and culture, or nuance such studies by offering “red readings” in the manner of James Cox in Mutting White Noise (2006). Jace Weaver, in his masterly overview of the field “More Light than Heat:
The Current State of Native American Studies” (2007) makes the point, which is obvious but only after he has articulated it, that “NAS [Native American Studies] is more than any text or class about Indians or in which Indians play a part. It must seek to understand the material from the perspective of the Natives. … History of white/Native interaction told largely or exclusively from the perspective of the settler colonizers is not NAS” (emphasis in original, 236). Clearly, there is much work for European scholars to do.

Our disciplinary playing field is uneven: we, non-Native and Native scholars alike, need to move the goalposts to favor the work of Native scholars, to honor the traditions of Native intellectual sovereignty (to borrow Robert Warrior's term) by recuperating, writing about, and teaching Native thinkers, and we need to write a narrative of Native America where indigenous peoples are the actors and subjects, not the objects of a dominant European gaze. Craig Womack, in Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism (1999) and Daniel Heath Justice in Our Fire Survives the Storm: A Cherokee Literary History (2006), have written exemplary tribal literary histories. But can the US national literary and historical narrative can be rewritten in a similar manner, to situate indigenous experience at the center of the story?

The editor of this special issue included in his CFP the following question: “How do NAS scholars answer charges by some within the academy that NAS is 'political activism' and not 'scholarship'?" My answer to this provocation is the counter-charge that no knowledge is innocent, no field of inquiry is apolitical, and that a nation-based area study like American Studies (or a language-based discipline like “English”) has always already been thoroughly politicized by the power dynamics of settler-indigenous relations. The way we are doing Native American Studies in Europe now works, in general, to benefit the political interests of the settler nation-state by legitimizing its myth of origin (in the dominant narrative of literary history), by erasing Native writing in favor of a canon of immigrant authors, by “melting” indigenous difference into the melting pot categories of “multi-ethnicity” or “Postcolonialism” or “Literature.” I think the future direction of Native American Literary Studies in Europe is quite clear. However, a great deal of work remains to be done to level that nationalist playing field on which the power games take place, to take us out of the ethnic “melting pot” and into a different kind of national fire which, to borrow Jace Weaver's metaphor, will allow our intellectual, pedagogical, and scholarly efforts to generate more light than heat (see Weaver, 2007).

NOTES


2. Incidentally, in the book by UK-based scholars that I have in mind, it is interestingly British to separate Native from Chicano literatures given that in Spain, Native American Studies tends to be folded into a dominant interest in Chicano/a Studies.
WORKS CITED


