Decolonizing America: Native Americans in Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*

At the midpoint of Thomas Pynchon's historical novel *Mason & Dixon* (1997), the eponymous protagonists pause in their task of drawing the Mason-Dixon line to visit the site of the 1763 Lancaster massacre. On the twenty-seventh of December of that year, fourteen Conestoga Indians were killed by a group of local vigilantes known as the Paxton Boys while supposedly under the protection of the authorities in the town's workhouse. The fourteen were believed to be the last of their tribe, another six having been killed just thirteen days before. News of this event reached far and wide, and was strongly condemned in a pamphlet by Benjamin Franklin as an "atrocious Fact, in Defiance of Government, of all Laws human and divine," committed by "barbarous Men." Whereas the actual Mason-Dixon field record sees only Charles Mason visiting Lancaster in early 1765, Jeremiah Dixon also attends in Pynchon's account. Both respond with horror to the massacre site. Pynchon depicts Mason bemoaning the Paxton Boys' belief that there will be no consequences and no debt to be paid, asserting that the place smelled of "Lethe-Water," and lamenting that "In Time, these People are able to forget ev'rything" (346). Dixon is equally affected, making a comparison to the extreme brutalities he witnessed in colonial South Africa but feeling that "far worse happen'd here, to these poor People" (347). This episode firmly establishes the violence perpetrated by settlers against Native Americans in the years preceding the formation of the American republic as one of the novel's central concerns. Moreover, *Mason & Dixon* is interested in North American indigenous culture in a broader sense; although the narrative is focalized through the British surveying team, Pynchon incorporates a vast array of references to Native peoples and practices.

Indeed, *Mason & Dixon* provides the most sustained engagement with Native Americans in Pynchon's fiction to date. References in Pynchon's early fiction are both scarce

and oblique: in *V.* (1963) we learn that "an Indian massacre in America" provided the inspiration for a gory piece of choreography in a theatrical adaptation called "The Rape of the Chinese Virgins" (413); in *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) Mr. Thoth remembers his grandfather, an "Indian killer," telling of Trystero disguising themselves as Indians to attack Pony Express riders (63-64); and in one of the several instances of genre play in *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) a scene from a Western movie is reimagined in which the "westwardman" Crutchfield and his "little pard" Whappo relish the prospect of meeting a "redskin" and the bloody shootout that will ensue (67-69).[1] *Vineland* (1990) is the first of Pynchon's novels to engage with Native Americans in any substantial way, demonstrating a degree of familiarity with the history, mythology, and social practices of the Californian Yurok, as discussed at length by Rosita Becke and Dirk Vanderbeke. *Mason & Dixon* then consolidates a trend of increased interest in Native culture in Pynchon's work, which continues to an extent in *Against the Day* (2006) – being principally expressed through Frank Traverse's interactions with the Tarahumare – but is less central to this world-spanning novel. The trend tails off in *Inherent Vice* (2009) and *Bleeding Edge* (2013), with a return to the kind of sporadic mentions found in the earlier works.

That Pynchon only began to address Native American contexts in a serious and substantial way in the latter, post-haitus part of his career is somewhat surprising, given that he is an American author whose earlier work pays deep and sustained attention to racial discrimination and violence within the U.S. – notably in his anti-segregationist short story "The Secret Integration" (1964) and his *New York Times* article "A Journey into the Mind of Watts" (1966) – as well as to colonial atrocities abroad. A particular interest that recurs in *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow* is, of course, the impact of European imperialism on the Herero and Khoikhoi peoples of South-West Africa. It is thus also surprising that pre-millennial Pynchon

[1] For a discussion of Pynchon's genre play see McHale.

criticism tended to neglect the centrality of race to his writing,[2] although this neglect is not limited to Pynchon but a general issue in analysis of postmodern literature. As Len Platt and Sara Upstone note, "there is a pronounced lack of discussion regarding attitudes to race in works by white British and American writers that employ a postmodern aesthetic, despite the fact that seminal accounts of postmodern culture identify marginality as a core preoccupation of postmodern literature" (2-3). Where Pynchon is concerned, at least, the delay in recognizing his engagement with race relates to the fact that his work's political and ethical seriousness – despite (or because of) its postmodernism – has only come to be widely critically accepted in the twenty-first century. In more recent years, publications like David Witzling's 2008 monograph *Everybody's America: Thomas Pynchon, Race, and the Cultures of Postmodernism* have made significant headway towards addressing this issue. However, where race *is* a focus of criticism, the emphasis has tended to be on black-white relations. To date, little critical work on Pynchon's novels has addressed Native American themes.[3]

The analysis of Pynchon's writing of Native Americans in *Mason & Dixon* I offer in what follows contributes to a broadening out of the analysis of race in Pynchon to consider his engagement with other non-white ethnicities. It also participates in attempts to reassess the potential for literature classified as postmodern to effectively and ethically engage with racial issues. To an extent, my reading of *Mason & Dixon* works alongside more general readings of postmodernism – in particular Linda Hutcheon's political readings – to challenge perspectives that disassociate postmodern fiction from the political. One example of the latter point of view that is relevant to issues of race and colonialism is Anthony Appiah's influential article "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?" (1991), in which

[2] See also Kim 5.

[3] Exceptions to this include the aforementioned article by Becke and Vanderbeke, and chapters by Harris and Greiner.

he argues that what he terms second-stage postcolonial fiction, including the writing of Yambo Ouologuem, is characterized by a "postrealism [that] is motivated quite differently from that of such postmodern writers as, say, Thomas Pynchon" (349). Ouologuem's postrealism is, for Appiah, a rejection of an earlier realist tradition that had asserted a nationalism and nativism that "had plainly failed" (349). He continues:

> Far from being a celebration of the nation, then, the novels of the second, postcolonial stage are novels of delegitimation: they reject not only the Western *imperium* but also the nationalist project of the postcolonial national bourgeoisie. And, so it seems to me, the basis for that project of delegitimation cannot be the postmodernist one: rather, it is grounded in an appeal to an ethical universal. Indeed it is based, as intellectual responses to oppression in Africa largely are based, in an appeal to a certain simple respect for human suffering, a fundamental revolt against the endless misery of the last thirty years. Ouologuem is hardly likely to make common cause with a relativism that might allow that the horrifying new-old Africa of exploitation is to be understood, legitimated, in its own local terms. (353)

Like those who have theorized postmodernism from a (neo-)Marxist perspective – most influentially Fredric Jameson and Terry Eagleton – Appiah aligns it with aesthetics rather than politics. He implies that its rejection of modernism's exclusivity was aimed at clearing a commercial space for itself (generating its own USP) rather than – as we might otherwise think – expressing a democratic impulse. He particularly criticizes it for failing to recognize its own Eurocentrism, its continuing treatment of ethnic others as "types," and its paradoxically militant relativism. This characterization may fit many examples of postmodern(ist) culture, but it misrepresents Pynchon's work.

Appiah is writing here before the publication of *Mason & Dixon*, so his inclusion of Pynchon's postmodernism within this critique can only be based on his earlier writing, up to

and possibly including *Vineland*. There *is* some legitimacy in a claim that this earlier work "types" non-whites (in which the influence of Kerouac's racialized primitivism can be read), although the later work moves away from this.[4] Throughout his work, however, Pynchon has never failed to recognize the privileged position from which he writes, a position he calls attention to and deconstructs at every turn. This forms part of the critique of Western power and practice that is foundational to his oeuvre. Nor does his writing express a militant relativism when it comes to human suffering. Despite the common equation of Pynchon's work with postmodernism and postmodernism with amoral relativism, his writing consistently takes a firm moral stand on abuses of power including racially-motivated persecution. Some critics see this as stretching back to the beginning of his career: David Cowart argues, for instance, that in *V.*'s depiction of colonial violence the "individualized suffering" of the Herero girl Sarah "brings fully into focus – and to devastating effect – the agony of multitudes" (196). Shawn Smith concurs with this perspective in his analysis of the narrator's statement in *V.* that the German general von Trotha, the officer who ordered mass killings of the Herero, "is reckoned to have done away with about 60,000 people. This is only 1 percent of six million, but still pretty good" (245). Smith suggests that the irony of "still pretty good" "should not be read as callous, but rather as a reminder of the inadequacy of words to express such horrors"; the "linguistic 'violence'" Pynchon does to the statistical fact of 60,000 deaths through this irony is a way in which the novel "revisions the world 'out-there,' which paradoxically may be the only way of recapturing the wounding immediacy of such cataclysms" (11). The ironic distancing seen here tends to decrease over the course of Pynchon's career; as illustrated by the example given at the opening of this essay, *Mason &*

[4] Pynchon's later writing of non-white people is not, by contrast, "realistic," but advertises its inability to pronounce on the realities of non-white culture through the resistance to representational realism that characterizes all of Pynchon's writing.

Dixon's condemnations of colonial violence often have a more straightforward emotional appeal. The later Pynchon is less shy of directly depicting "soft" affects such as Mason and Dixon's sympathy for the massacred Conestoga, but such affects underlie and motivate even his earlier depictions of racial violence.[5]

Beyond its affective qualities, the Lancaster episode also crystallizes Pynchon's critique of "the West" in *Mason & Dixon*, operating as a nexus for political commentaries on colonial brutality, capitalist exploitation, and certain Western forms of knowledge-production as fundamentally interrelated forces. The massacre is not treated as an isolated, "freak" incident but as emblematic of the violence colonialism provokes in every iteration; within the episode a link is made from Lancaster and British colonialism in North America to Dutch colonialism in South Africa, not only via Dixon's comparison of the massacre to the settler "Criminality of the Cape" (347), but also via the inverted five-pointed star that adorns the sign of The Dutch Rifle pub in Lancaster, reminding both Mason and Dixon of the "Sterloop" symbol they had seen on firearms in the South African bush. The workhouse site is also being exploited for commercial purposes as tourists flock to it with "Sketching-Books" and "Specimen-Bags" (341-42), a scenario that gestures towards a deep connection between racist violence and capitalism. In attempting to create their own representations of the scene of the massacre and appropriate its objects to become display items in white homes, the tourists – who include Mason and Dixon themselves – raise the issue of how knowledge about an event like this is produced and perpetuated, by whom and for whom, and for what purposes.

Pynchon, I argue, emphasizes his own potential participation as a writer in such colonially and commercially-inflected knowledge production. His narrator laments, in one of the most eloquent passages of the novel, the processes by which "wherever 'tis not yet

[5] As Hutcheon clarifies, paraphrasing Umberto Eco, irony in historiographic metafiction is "intricately involved in seriousness of purpose and theme. In fact irony may be the only way we *can* be serious today" (*Poetics* 39).

mapp'd, nor *written down*" the British empire advances towards "the next Territory to the West [to] be seen and *recorded, measur'd and tied in*, back into the Net-Work of Points already known […] winning away from the realm of the Sacred, its Borderlands one by one, and assuming them unto the bare mortal World that is our home, and our Despair" (345, my italics). The focus of the following section of this article is thus the manner in which Pynchon critiques Western knowledge production – and specifically the captivity narrative form – while negotiating his own position as a canonical white male author and descendent of pre-republican settlers. I examine how Pynchon represents Indian-white relations in *Mason & Dixon* so as to demonstrate an awareness of his own act of writing's potential complicity with the colonial-capitalist forces his narrator despairs of.[6] This aspect of Pynchon's writing of race accords with Linda Hutcheon's concept of the politics of postmodern historiographic metafiction, which *Mason & Dixon* is certainly an example of; as Hutcheon explains, such writing not only challenges totality or metanarrative, as Lyotard would have it, but is aware that in the very act of doing so it simultaneously "inscribe[s]" totality (*Poetics* 55). However, I also suggest that Pynchon does not stop at this critique of Western knowledge production, and the second section of my analysis illustrates how his approach extends to an active valorization of the distinct modes of knowledge production of colonized peoples and a promotion of routes to their cultural survivance.[7] This latter form of negotiation with

[6] Pynchon is descended from William Pynchon, an early colonial settler who traded for furs with the local Indians and learnt their language. Interestingly, during King Philip's War, the conflict in which Mary Rowlandson was taken captive, William Pynchon's son John apparently took the side of a Native who had been accused of acting against the colony, considering that the evidence against him was not strong enough and being inclined to believe the testimony of other Native Americans over that of his fellow settlers. See Drake 47.

[7] Although Hutcheon emphasizes the critical dimension of historiographic metafiction over its constructive aspects, her discussion of the importance of the "ex-centric" to postmodernism is somewhat aligned with my approach here. See Hutcheon, *Poetics*, especially Chapter 4.

colonization is read through theoretical frameworks developed in response to ongoing capital-backed coloniality in the present day, which the anachronism-filled *Mason & Dixon* certainly alludes to, despite its eighteenth-century setting. These frameworks emerge from two different non-Western yet "American" perspectives. The decolonial arguments of Aníbal Quijano and Walter Mignolo for "epistemo-diversity" derive from the Latin American colonial experience, while the Native American writer and critic Gerald Vizenor's conceptualization of a "postindian" literature of survivance is a product of colonization in North America.

1. Undermining the "literature of dominance": *Mason & Dixon*'s Captivity Narrative

The captivity narrative genre – variously authentic autobiographical accounts of the experiences of settlers who were abducted by American Indians – was a common white-authored form in the pre-republican period and indeed up until the end of the nineteenth century. As June Namias argues, captivity narratives are very often "steeped in propaganda and ethnic hatred generated by years of colonial warfare," and can be considered "part of the effort to justify conquest and expansion" (805). These narratives, the most well-known of which is certainly *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682), orientate themselves around a strict dichotomy between supposedly pious, innocent white abductees and Native captors depicted as viciously depraved. As Vizenor puts it, captivity narratives are "similuations of the *indian* other," whose obsession with "the sentiments of savagism" reveal "the scares and aversions of nature, atavistic visions, ecstatic severance, the daemons of the unconscious, and the ruse of cultural nationalism" (*Fugitive Poses* 44, italics in original).

Demonstrating his own recognition of this, Pynchon includes a distinctive short version of a captivity narrative in part two of *Mason & Dixon*. Although it only takes up a

few pages of the novel, it replicates several of the conventions of the traditional accounts: Eliza Fields is taken from her Conestoga kitchen by certain "unimagin'd dark Men" (512) and escorted through forests, over mountains, and along rivers to Quebec, where she is apparently sold into the hands of Jesuit priests. The journey is lengthy and hazardous, and as per convention, reference is made early on to the piety of the captive: her concern for her "Soul in Christ" (512). A significant difference, however, relates to the representation of the captors. In Pynchon's version, although the Natives are described as "wild" (512), they come across as strangely passive, almost absent. We know that Eliza is kidnapped, but it seems that she goes with her captors without any form of struggle, accepting her fate almost as if entranced by their presence. The narrator is at pains to point out that the Indians "did not bind, or abuse, or, unless they must, speak to her" (513). The strangely absent presence of the Natives in Pynchon's captivity narrative seems to result from their quiet gentleness, which in itself can be read as a deliberate allusion to fact that the general trend in the genre is to represent Native Americans primarily through their acts of violence. Moreover, their muteness reflects an awareness of the relative voicelessness of the American Indian in both the historical and literary record.

Pynchon's narrator's assertion that Eliza was not bound or abused also points to the inconsistencies that trouble assertions of a simple civilized/savage dichotomy in many original captivity narratives. Taking Rowlandson's *Narrative* as an example, there is a particular passage in which her bias against the Natives comes into tension for a moment. After learning that she is to be ransomed back to her family, Rowlandson states that

> I have been in the midst of those roaring lions, and savage bears, that feared neither God, nor man, nor the devil, by night and day, alone and in company, sleeping all sorts together, and yet not one of them ever offered me the least abuse of unchastity to me, in word or action. (285)

This contradictory description of her captors as animalistic and immoral, yet at the same time polite and respectful, is resolved as follows:

> Though some are ready to say I speak it for my own credit; but I speak it in the presence of God, and to His Glory. God's power is as great now, and as sufficient to save, as when He preserved Daniel in the lion's den; or the three children in the fiery furnace. (285)

Rowlandson attributes the good treatment she receives to the protective hand of God, not to the character of the Natives; kindness or sympathy on their part is always explained away as divine Providence. The same logic characterizes many other captivity narratives.[8] In underlining the decency of Eliza's captors in his version of a captivity narrative without including the prerequisite mention of Providence, Pynchon thus alludes to the partiality of the genre and derides the hypocrisy of the Puritan beliefs on which it was founded.

A second means by which Pynchon critiques and deconstructs the logic of the captivity narrative relates to another significant point of divergence between Eliza's experience and generic standards. There are striking moments when the tenor of Pynchon's version is quite unlike that of the autobiographical accounts, with an explicitly (rather than implicitly) erotic dimension being brought to bear. Thus, when Eliza is first captured, much emphasis is placed on the virtual nakedness of her kidnappers, and she risks looking into their faces, we are told, since "[t]he only other place to look was down at the secret Flesh, glistening, partly hidden, partly glimps'd behind the creas'd and odorous Deer-skin clouts" (512) – clouts being a word for breech or loin cloths. Like Rowlandson, once she has begun

[8] To give just a few examples, Susannah Johnson explains that "Providence … inclined our savage masters to mercy" (45) after she was abducted from Charleston in 1754; Cotton Mather, narrating of the story of Hannah Dustan, claims that "the good God, who hath all 'hearts in his own hands,' heard the sighs of these prisoners, and gave them to find unexpected favor from the master who hath laid claim unto them" (355); and the lengthy title of Jonathan Dickenson's narrative gives clear credit to "God's Protecting Providence" in saving a group of shipwrecked traders "From the cruel Devouring Jaws of the Inhumane Canibals of Florida."

her journey she is required to cross a river, but while Rowlandson takes it as a "favor of God" (243) that she does not get her feet wet in doing so, Eliza steps onto the far bank feeling that "she had made herself naked at last, for all of them, but secretly for herself" (513). These moments prefigure what is to come when Eliza is taken into the Jesuit College and discovers that she is now a member of a Sisterhood known as Las Viudas de Cristo (The Widows of Christ) whose sexual services, often involving sado-masochism and the wearing of elaborate fetish-wear, are sold to Chinese buyers. This second part of Eliza's narrative constitutes a clearly deliberate pastiche of Grub Street hack pornography, and particularly the anti-clerical genre which was at its height in late eighteenth-century England, and contemporaneously in New England.[9] This is the period of the novel's frame narrative, in which the Reverend Cherrycoke is telling the Mason and Dixon story to his nephews and nieces, and eventually we learn that Eliza's tale is not part of the main story, but is being read by Cherrycoke's niece, Tenebrae, from just such a work of hack gothic erotica, a fictional series called *The Ghastly Fop*, whose cover apparently depicts two scantily-clad cavorting nuns.

In order to explain Pynchon's eroticization of the captivity genre we need to consider the ways in which captivity narratives have been historically consumed. As noted, the genre was extremely popular well into the nineteenth century, some readers being attracted to tales like Rowlandson's as the bearers of moral and religious lessons, but others, no doubt, for the vivid depictions of horrific violence as well as the salacious allusions to miscegenation they often contained. Of course, the people of who wrote and published captivity narratives did so with a variety of motives, and very often the reputation of the protagonist would have relied on an account that would stress his or her maintenance of Puritan mores throughout the ordeal. Rowlandson's account, in fact, has a close relationship with upholding strict Puritan

[9] A notable example is Jean Barrin's *Venus in the Cloister: or, the Nun in her Smock*, first translated from the French by Henry Rhodes in the same year as the publication of the original, 1683.

doctrine, critics being in overall agreement that the Puritan minister Increase Mather, father of Cotton Mather, had a significant role in the publication and perhaps even the writing of the piece.[10] His interest in the narrative would have derived from its capacity to provide a moral lesson to the colonist in relation to what he considered their lapses from strict Puritan principles. Yet while Rowlandson's *Narrative* was not brought to publication with the aim of trading on its sensationalist aspects, in creating the necessary disparity between an innocent, pious Rowlandson and her "heathen" captors the brutality of the latter had to be emphasized. A particularly horrific instance occurs when a heavily-pregnant white captive is stripped naked and danced around in a "hellish manner" before being killed with her two-year old infant and burnt in a fire, apparently to serve as an example to other captives who might try to escape (264).

Other captivity tales, and especially later ones, traded more openly on their shocking content, with frontispieces promising "thrilling" or "affecting" narratives detailing "cruel hardships," "miraculous escape[s]," and "horrid massacres" at the "merciless hands of the Savages" in bold print.[11] In the nineteenth century, accounts were increasingly written with publication in mind, and ghost-writers tended to "distort the woman's recollections and words" according to what they imagined "the public wanted to read" (Myres 50). In the case of *The Affecting Narrative of the Captivity and Sufferings of Mrs. Mary Smith* (1815), for instance, this meant emphasizing the captive's disdain for her Native captors as well as her submission to their sexual exploitation (Myres 50). Pynchon's awareness that there was a broad public appetite for such accounts is demonstrated by both Tenebrae and her cousin

[10] See Zabelle Derounian.

[11] See, for instance, the frontispieces of *An Affecting Narrative of the Captivity and Sufferings of Mrs. Mary Smith* (1815), *An Authentic Narrative of the Seminole War* (1836), and Sarah Ann Horn's *An Authentic and Thrilling Narrative of the Captivity of Mrs. Horn and her two children, with Mrs Harris by the Camanche Indians* (1853).

Ethelmer's avid consumption of *The Ghastly Fop* as well as Tenebrae's younger brothers' request that Cherrycoke put more details about fighting, killing, and "Indians" into his Mason-Dixon narrative (316) (which, in turn, raises the question of the reader's desires and expectations in consuming Pynchon's novel). Indeed, this appetite remained strong through the late nineteenth century (kept alive in "penny dreadfuls") and has persisted at least into the late twentieth century in the Western genre and pulp erotica.[12]

In this way, *Mason & Dixon* challenges the captivity narrative's tendency to distinguish rigidly between settlers and Natives in terms of morality, and attempts to rebalance the historical and literary record by implying that even their Puritan readership was at least as lustful and bloodthirsty (whether this was suppressed or not) as the Natives were considered to be. False impressions of indigenous people resulting from the popularity of the captivity narrative genre, Pynchon suggests, must be understood as originating much more in a white penchant for sensationalist tales of cruelty and violence than in any historical "reality" of Native life. Pynchon's version reveals the captivity narrative to be exactly what Vizenor describes it as, a "simulation of the indian other" that revels in the "sentiments of savagism." It is a form that, looked at from this angle, elucidates strikingly the co-operation of colonization and coloniality, capitalism, and imperial knowledge-production into the present day.

Mason & Dixon's satire on the captivity narrative exemplifies Hutcheon's argument that "postmodernist parody is a value-problematizing, de-naturalizing form of acknowledging the history (and through irony, the politics) of representations" (*Politics* 90). It also accords with Vizenor's understanding of the "postmodern condition" as "a counterpoise in 'wild knowledge' and language games, an invitation to a 'reflexive nature' that would undermine the trust of presence in translation, representation, and simulations" (*Manifest Manners* 69). It

[12] For an account of the captivity narrative's more modern incarnations see McCafferty.

is one aspect of his work among many in which Pynchon challenges what Quijano calls "coloniality of power": the power that is maintained by the coloniser after the end of "formal and explicit" (168) colonialism in many countries, which Quijano connects fundamentally to the persistence of global capitalism. For Quijano this ongoing power also derives in large part from the colonial "repression [that] fell, above all, over the modes of knowing, of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives" of the colonized, coupled with "the imposition of the use of the rulers' own patterns of expression," resulting in a lasting "colonization of the imagination of the dominated" (169). The way in which Pynchon goes beyond a self-contained critique of Western power to acknowledge the repression of the modes of knowing of the colonized – and to encourage the recognition by whites of both this fact and the value of knowledge forms that developed outside of the Western tradition – is my next topic.

2. "Spaces beyond and elsewhere": Epistemological Diversity, Mutual Hybridity, and Oppositional Storytelling

Deconstructing colonial modes of knowledge is a necessary first step in encouraging a move beyond them towards epistemo-diversity. As Walter Mignolo puts it, decoloniality – which is distinguished from a postcoloniality seen as still grounded in Eurocentric epistemology – "means both the analytic task of unveiling the logic of coloniality and the prospective task of contributing to build a world in which many worlds will coexist" (54). The aim of the "decolonial option" in challenging the often unrecognized and unquestioned global dominance of a way of thinking and producing knowledge that initially developed in Europe, is to work towards a world in which multiple epistemological avenues are available in a situation of mutual recognition that a totalizing vision of humanity need not and must not also

be a vision of uniformity of culture or epistemological standpoint.[13] Although Pynchon's work is a product of this Western episteme and cannot detach itself from that heritage even as it reacts against it – just as Pynchon cannot disassociate himself from the privileges that come with his whiteness, or his middle-class background – I argue that his fiction labors to stand against Western dominance and complements and encourages readers' acceptance of the value of epistemo-diversity. In *Mason & Dixon* this occurs through sections of the narrative that directly represent Native Americans.

Whereas the Natives are strangely absent in the captivity narrative passage, in other sections of the novel distinct indigenous epistemologies are afforded space. For instance, in the discussion of whether the Visto Mason and Dixon's surveying team are hacking out of the forest should be allowed to pass the Great Warrior Path, Native technologies are pitted in no uncertain terms against those of the surveyors. An Iroquois delegation consisting of Mohawk chiefs, Onondaga chiefs, several warriors, and two women, meets the surveying party as they approach the Path. As they observe the use of a large sector, which arrives "in its pillow'd Waggon, mindfully borne by the five-shilling Hands, impressive in its assembl'd Size," the implicit expectation that the Iroquois will be filled with wonder is suddenly undercut: "The first time they see the Sector brought into the Meridian, the Indians explain, that for as long as anyone can remember, the Iroquois nations as well, have observ'd Meridian Lines as Boundaries to separate them one from another" (648). We also learn a little later in the novel, that the "High-ways of all inland America" (647), of which the Great Warrior Path is the most important, are "connected upon a Scale Continental, that nothing we know of in North Britain can equal" (674). The ability to achieve order and interconnection on such a scale without lugging around heavy "modern" sectors, and while maintaining a symbiotic

[13] Mignolo emphasizes that this project of "decolonizing knowledge is not rejecting Western epistemic contributions" but making use of them in a way that disconnects them from "imperial designs" (82).

relationship with the land that lends Native technologies an "organic" quality as opposed to the alienation from nature embodied in the Visto as "a long, perfect scar," a "hateful Assault" on the Earth (542), implies that Western science could learn a lot from such people.[14]

In a postsecular move, moreover, Iroquois religious beliefs are given at least equal weight with those of the surveying party in conversations between them. For instance, the Indians' confident assertion that their spirit village lies on the western horizon passes without comment, whereas Mason, in describing the dwelling place of the Christian God, points upwards "rather uncertainly" and is derided by Dixon, who "cocks a merry eye" at him, asking whether the he should have indicated the whole sky, rather than merely the zenith (651). This ridiculing of the epistemological arrogance of Mason and Dixon as representatives of Western civilization continues as, shortly after this exchange, British constellation names become a source of amusement for the Iroquois when they are told that the entirety of Ursa Major is known as the Great Bear in English, with three of the stars considered to form the bear's tail, making it far too long; for the Iroquois the three stars in question, we are told, represent hunters in pursuit. Here the Brits are not even deemed capable of physiological accuracy in imagining a bear. In presenting the surveyors engaging in entirely two-sided conversations with the Iroquois on a range of complex topics, then, *Mason & Dixon* affords indigenous peoples a presence that was denied them in forms of writing like the captivity narrative.

It is interesting to consider, in the light of these representations, where we might place Pynchon's writing in relation to two forms of literature theorized by Vizenor, the "literature of dominance" and the "literature of survivance." In his book *Manifest Manners: Narratives*

[14] David J. Greiner makes a similar point in suggesting that "the humanity of [*Mason & Dixon*] is fully articulated in [Pynchon's] acknowledgment of prior boundaries established by the Indians" (81).

on Postindian Survivance (1994),[15] published just three years before *Mason & Dixon*, Vizenor draws heavily on the work of postmodern thinkers like Jean Baudrillard to argue that the concept of the "Indian" is irredeemably a "simulation" – acknowledging that there is no underlying "real," but rather a complex network of competing stories. One set of such stories makes up the "literature of dominance": narratives about Native Americans that have emerged from white, dominant mainstream. This literature, for Vizenor, has emphasized the "tragic" tribal experience (16). But another set of narratives, produced by past and present "postindian warriors," challenges dominant narratives that define the Indian, using their awareness of the absence of the "real" as an opportunity to "create a new tribal presence in stories" (12). Vizenor sees no contradiction between postmodernism and the creation of such presence. As he puts it in his own inimical postmodern style, such warriors "observe postmodern situations, theories of simulation, deconstruction, postindian encounters, silence, remembrance, and other themes of survivance that would trace the inventions of tribal cultures by missionaries and ethnologists to the truancies and cruelties of a melancholy civilization" (12-13).

Pynchon is not a postindian warrior; to suggest this would not only wildly exaggerate the degree of his engagement with Native American issues, which is just one among many elements even in *Mason & Dixon*, but would also co-opt a position of Native American strength. However, that his novel goes some way in embracing epistemo-diversity is demonstrated by the similarities between the "literature of survivance" as described by Vizenor and Pynchon's approach to representing the Iroquois. I would suggest that in the scenes described above they have a "tribal presence" (12) in Vizenor's terms: a positive presence (albeit one unburdened by an idea of the "real") that replaces the untrustworthy

[15] In this article I am using the 1999 edition, whose title is given here. The book was retitled in this edition, the original 1994 title being *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance*.

presence-in-absence of the "translation, representation, and simulations" typically produced by the dominant culture. While the "literature of dominance" in its more sympathetic iterations adopts a tragic mode that foregrounds the "stoic Indian" trope – an example Vizenor picks out being the 1990 movie *Dances with Wolves* – Pynchon does not represent Native Americans directly as tragic, but makes the tragedies that have befallen them reflect back onto Western culture, as in the Lancaster massacre scene. In *Manifest Manners* Vizenor notes that "[t]he tribes were tragic, never comic, or ironic, in the literature of dominance" (79) and complains that they "have seldom been honored for their trickster stories and rich humor. The resistance to tribal humor is a tragic flaw. Laughter over that comic touch in tribal stories would not steal the breath of destitute children; rather, children would be healed with humor" (83). In the "literature of survivance" Vizenor thus calls for "an aesthetic restoration of trickster hermeneutics" involving "characters that liberate the mind and never reach a closure in stories" (*Manifest Manners* 14-15). Although Pynchon's stylistics originate in another cultural tradition, this description again fits his work quite well; his novels consistently resist narrative closure in a way that could certainly be said to "liberate the mind" from its expectations of the novel form, and he is also an incorrigible user of (often quite crass) humor which is not that different from some of the humor found in Native American trickster tales. In line with the "literature of survivance," the Iroquois characters Pynchon writes in *Mason & Dixon* are also notably given to humor. As mentioned, they are highly amused by the long tail of the British Ursa Major, but they are also depicted as laughing through many of their exchanges with Mason and Dixon. To give another example, when the axe-men who have been clearing the Visto depart as it reaches its terminus, the Mohawk Hendricks asks, "What do they believe waits them, on the other side of the River, that sends them away so fast?"; the response is that they suspect either hostile tribes, or "a tribe whose Name they've never heard" (663). Hendricks has barely translated this for his

Iroquois companions before being "careen'd by the gathering Sea of Mirth" that builds around the recognition that "We know that Tribe, - we are afraid of them, too, the Tribe with no Name" (663-64). The Indians "continu[e] to laugh for what, to Europeans, might seem a length of time far out of proportion to the Jest" (664) which, to complete the tricksterish quality of the passage, is not explained to a reader who does not already understand, frustrating closure in allowing for a multiplicity of possible interpretations.

It might be objected, at this point, that *Mason & Dixon*'s parallels with Vizenor's "literature of survivance" are limited because the narrative takes place in the eighteenth century and hence has no relationship with "survivance" in the present day. However, such an objection does not take into account Pynchon's sophisticated use of anachronism, something we have seen in his treatment of the captivity narrative as a trans-historical emblem of the overlapping forces of desire, power, and knowledge in British coloniality in America. Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds explains Pynchon's use of anachronism in this novel as follows:

> With its running subject of calendar reform, *Mason & Dixon* processes anachronism at several levels of plot and style to recast the eighteenth century in postmodern terms. This temporal matrix demonstrates the eighteenth-century "roots" of late-twentieth-century culture, but more than that, it reconstructs an eighteenth century "made" in the late twentieth, the result of which is to combine the ideologies of each century irretrievably into the other. It is through its many styles of anachronism that *Mason & Dixon* re-creates the several cultures of the eighteenth century and joins them with the late modern world. (9)

Two particular "styles of anachronism" that Pynchon employs to "recast the eighteenth century in postmodern terms" which are relevant to Native American survivance in the present are, firstly, a valuing of (a certain kind of) mutual hybridity, and secondly, an

assertion of the power of storytelling, both of which support epistemo-diversity and hence indefinite survivance into the future.

"Hybridity" can be a very ambiguous term, so it is worth clarifying that – in contrast, for instance, to the unidirectional "hybridity" of *Mason & Dixon*'s Europeanized Chief Catfish identified by Michael Harris in his chapter on "Pynchon's Postcoloniality" – the hybridity that the novel presents as *valuable* is not a euphemism for assimilation to the dominant culture. Instead it is a mutual hybridity, such that the colonizers also take on some of the knowledge, practices and values of the colonized. It is questionable whether Mason and Dixon themselves embody this hybridity when it comes to the colonial context in America. Both find themselves, for instance, at differing times in favor of neglecting the Iroquois' injunction not to cross the Warrior Path so that they can complete their Visto, although they are ultimately described as acknowledging "the Justice of the Indians' desires" (701) in this respect. However, their attitudes are unfavorably juxtaposed with those of two other historical figures whose attitude towards Native perspectives is respectful, and who have taken on some of their knowledge and practices to become hybrid: Hugh Crawford, the white guide and interpreter for the Iroquois, and Sir William Johnson, the superintendent of Indian affairs and agent to the Iroquois from the mid-1750s until his death in 1774. Both figures had spent considerable time in Indian-held territories by the time of Mason and Dixon's visit in 1767. Crawford is not only capable of translating for the Iroquois, but he also demonstrates an understanding of their distinct epistemology (as conceptualized by Pynchon) when it comes to paths and trails. When Mason suggests to him that the Visto should be allowed to cross the Warrior Path, arguing that "It'll take us a quarter of an hour. We'll clean up ev'ry trace of our Passage, – what are they worried about, the running surface? their deerskin shoes? we'll resurface it for them, we'll give 'em Moccasin Vouchers, – " (646), Crawford replies: "Mr. Mason, they treat this Trail as they would a River, – they settle both

sides of it, so as to have it secure, – they need the unimpeded Flow. Cutting it with your Visto would be like putting an earthen Dam across a River" (646-47).

Sir William Johnson's hybridity goes even further. Earlier on their journey, Mason and Dixon reach Johnson's estate, where they witness a utopia of sorts persisting on the frontier,

> observing about them Indian men smoking together in the clement Afternoon, or shaking Peach-Pits in a Bowl and betting upon the Results, whilst children run about with Sticks and Balls and women sit together with their Work, and there he is, himself the Irish Baronet, wearing Skins, and a Raccoon Hat, out among his People, the Serfs of Johnson Castle, moving easily among the groups switching among the English, Mohawk, Seneca, and Onondaga Languages as needed. (532)

This account accords with the historical record, where Johnson's homes are described as

> places where people and cultures mingled. ... Indians were there constantly. He hosted, lodged, fed, and entertained Indian visitors, and he complained to his superiors that Indians ate him out of house and home. He and Molly [his Mohawk second wife] had eight children together. Johnson donned Indian attire and hosted feasts of bear meat; Molly donned European clothes and served tea in porcelain crockery. (Calloway 52)

For Pynchon, I would argue, this particular example of two-way hybridity merits mention in *Mason & Dixon* as an example of peaceful coexistence in the context of an overall scenario on the frontier of cultural disrespect, persecution, and war. Yet his depiction of the Indians inhabiting the estate as Johnson's "People" – his "Serfs" – demonstrates Pynchon's awareness of two facts: firstly, that the Indians are present because of their dependence on Johnson as a powerful negotiator; secondly, that Johnson's hybridity was a useful pose. As Calloway puts it, "He went native to the extent that doing so promoted his own and his empire's interests" (52). The tension in *Mason & Dixon* between the Sir William who learns

multiple Indian languages, and the Sir William who charges "£500 for his Trouble" (636) in negotiating with the tribes the progress of the Visto beyond the Alleghenies, points to the author's distrust of claims for hybridity that emerge from capitalist-colonial exigencies, an issue that is very much live in the present day.

Thus Pynchon highlights that not all forms of mutual hybridity are equal. This is in line with Mignolo's perspective on the related concept of cosmopolitanism. In *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* Mignolo argues, however, that there is scope for what he calls a "decolonial cosmopolitanism":

> Cosmopolitanism cannot be a top-down global order, nor can it be the privilege of "frequent travelers" and tri-continental subjects. Cosmopolitanism shall be thought out in relation to a heterogenous historico-structural conception of history and society ... and world order, rather than in a unilinear narrative of history and a hierarchical organization of society. Decolonial cosmopolitanism shall be "the becoming of a pluriversal world order" built on and dwelling in the global borders of modernity/coloniality. (270)

Pynchon's anti-capitalist, anarchist politics thus positions him as a writer who would aspire to promote decolonial cosmopolitanism.[16] He is also, as we have seen, certainly adverse to "unilinear narrative[s] of history." Instead, all of his novels reflect an understanding of history as "a great disorderly Tangle of Lines, long and short, weak and strong, vanishing into the Mnemonick Deep, with only their Destination in common" (349), as his narrator Wicks Cherrycoke puts it. Pynchon does not seek to untangle these lines, but to both investigate conflicts between them – as he does at the crossing of the Mason-Dixon line with the Warrior Path – and contribute towards rebalancing the "long and short" and the "weak and strong" by challenging the legitimacy of sustained and dominant historical narratives and opening up

[16] I have discussed Pynchon's anti-capitalist, anarchist politics at length in my monograph *Thomas Pynchon and American Counterculture* (2014).

space for the histories – including those of Native American peoples – that have been curtailed and neglected through the action of historical "Lethe-Water."[17]

This attitude towards official history ties in closely with the second method by which *Mason & Dixon* aligns itself with the project of Native survivance: asserting the power of storytelling to sustain communities and enable coexistence. The only story that is told by a Native American character in the novel is the tale of a distant, magical valley in which over-sized vegetables grow, including a giant hemp plant which soon becomes a focus of activity as long-houses are built on some of "the sturdier Branches" before pilgrims, jobbers, "Renegadoes" and "Enterprizers" turn up, eventually resulting in armed conflict (655). Told by the Mohawk Nicholas, this is a hybrid story in which Pynchon combines aspects of his own distinctive style with elements of Native American and British oral traditions: the gigantism that features in many tribal creation stories – albeit usually of an animal rather than vegetable nature – overlapping with that of British tales like "Jack and the Beanstalk."[18] This source material is reconfigured as part of a postmodern retelling of the colonization of America, the hemp plant tale clearly representing in microcosm the novel's overall concerns with how capital-motivated claims over what could be a shared resource leads to senseless violence. It is notable in the context of hybridity and sharing that the plant referred to is

[17] I would note that this is not a case of simply "mov[ing] the marginal to the center" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 69); rather, it is an assertion of the existence of multiple centers of meaning and a denial of priority to any particular one.

[18] This "overlapping" of Native American and European narratives is an approach Pynchon takes throughout the novel, in fact. For instance, various characters provide histories of particular tribes or North American indigenous people in general which draw variously on "myths" like that of a tribe of Welsh "Indians" inscribing Ogham onto rocks (497, 600), or "facts" like the pre-Columbian Norse expeditions to North America and encounters with the "Skrællings" (633-34), and the existence of impressive mound-buildings cultures from which modern-day Native Americans are thought to be descended.

apparently the cannabis hemp plant, introduced to North America by Europeans and adopted by tribes including the Iroquois for their own purposes, including medicinal uses and as a psychological aid (Moerman 119). The story is also told by Nicholas to listeners including Mason and Dixon as an invitation to smoke together, something that in Iroquois culture historically (as well as in many modern-day cultures) is understood as an affirmation of friendship bonds.[19]

For Vizenor, stories "are" our reality: there are only simulations. He quotes Baudrillard's explanation that "to simulate is not simply to feign ... Someone who simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms" (13). This presents an opportunity for what we might broadly call "counter-simulations," and in Vizenor's theory "postindian simulations." Vizenor describes how the simulations of the dominant culture resulted in "the invention of the Indian," in response to which "[t]he postindian ousts the inventions with humor, new stories, and the simulations of survivance" (*Manifest Manners* 5). Immediately after the hemp plant story is told by Nicholas, Pynchon's narrator notes that "talking about things, while not exactly causing them to happen, does cause something, – which is almost the same, tho' not quite" (655). Following this Mason and Dixon are described as traveling on into the valley of the giant vegetables, which they find being farmed communally rather than fought over. In this specific instance, and more generally throughout his writing, Pynchon attempts to afford discursive space to alterative simulations in line with a politics that is anti-capitalist, communal, anti-hierarchical and – in Vizenor's sense – postindian. This promotion of the overlapping co-existence of multiple narratives/simulations among which none is dominant also means that Pynchon's fiction converges with the multi-centric pluriversality of the decolonial option as conceptualized by Mignolo.

[19] Goodman, Sherratt, and Lovejoy note that "[e]ven the term 'smoking,' when used as a figure of speech in Iroquois political rhetoric, symbolized peaceful, friendly discourse" (71).

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The account I have given here does not do full justice to the breadth of *Mason & Dixon*'s engagement with Native American cultures, but I hope it goes some way towards clarifying its depth and significance. This late twentieth-century novel, I have suggested, is strongly invested in criticizing the injustices of modern capitalist colonialism (and ongoing coloniality) by deconstructing past and present modes of Western knowledge production from within that tradition. But it is just as strongly invested in supporting non-Eurocentric critical positions that assert the value of cultural and epistemological traditions that developed outside of the "West." Indeed, Pynchon engages in the deconstruction of dominant totalizing paradigms as an activity which complements the endorsement or creation of alternatives to these. Although Pynchon's writing will always have the West at its center in the sense that, as an author shaped by that tradition both personally and in literary terms, he necessarily addresses his work to it, Pynchon is fundamentally concerned with how the West might change its ways.

Mason & Dixon's writing of Native Americans posits that an inquisitive openness to non-Western modes of understanding the world and practices of existing within it is one way in which such change might occur. Learning from other cultures is not the same as appropriating them, although maintaining that distinction has its difficulties. As I have argued, in *Mason & Dixon* Pynchon goes to extreme lengths to disassociate his fiction from forms of writing that would claim the authority to define indigenous culture, reduce its complexity, or make a commodity of it. This may be a reason for Pynchon's apparent hesitance to engage directly or substantially with indigenous Americans in his earlier work, and could also explain the fact that even in *Mason & Dixon* the engagement is somewhat tentative and, though pervasive, rarely operates in the narrative foreground. Although finding support for decolonial pluriversality and Native American survivance in Pynchon's writing of

race sits uncomfortably with certain general theories of postmodernism that are still to a large extent in the ascendant, going somewhat beyond even Linda Hutcheon's concept of what postmodern politics might look like, we should not for that reason discount or ignore the existence of these currents in Pynchon's work.[20] Rather than remaining beholden to unhelpful generalizations, we should instead allow the ethics and politics of each individual work to speak for themselves. In its manner of engaging with Native American culture, *Mason & Dixon* speaks for a world in which white Western society might come to understand its own hypocrisies and blindnesses, and open itself to other perspectives.

[20] This is not to say that all theories of postmodernism generalize to the same degree. One theorist attentive to different categories of literary postmodernism is Boaventura de Sousa Santos, whose category of "oppositional postmodernism" (de Sousa Santos 228), which Mignolo considers "akin to border thinking (border epistemology, border gnosis) and to the decolonial option" (73), fits with my characterization of *Mason & Dixon* here.

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