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## Navigating the In-Between: Cultural Uneasiness and Hybridity in Native American Captivity Narratives

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Narratives

“Her clothes, like her life, her demeanor, and her speech, were a blend of cultures: buckskin moccasins, an Indian blanket, a brown flannel gown, a petticoat, and a bonnet. She spoke clearly with ‘a little of Irish emphasis’ of her origin still recognizable in her voice” (Namias 3). This is a portrait of Mary Jemison, drawn by June Namias, editor of Jemison’s biography *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*. Namias is describing a moment from 1823, when Jemison was an elderly woman and relating her story to James Seaver, who went on to publish her biography. When Jemison was twelve-years-old she was captured by the Seneca Tribe, one of the five tribes of the northeast Iroquois Confederacy. Jemison was taken from her Protestant family, who immigrated from Ireland to Pennsylvania in the mid-seventeen hundreds. She was taken by the Seneca Tribe through an instance of Iroquois “mourning war,” a process through which adult or child captives were taken with the intention of adopting them into the tribe in order to fill a societal and familial position otherwise vacated by a death in the tribe (Richter 70). Captivity narratives like Mary Jemison’s are often marked by their lack of strict cultural binaries. Namias’ description of Jemison highlights the mixed-nature of her cultural identity, an identity which often became the site of uneasiness or ambiguity as the place of intersection between two clashing cultures, that of the American settler colony and Native American tribe.

Cultural uneasiness is a product of an often violent conjunction between two cultures that are foregrounded by systemic attitudes toward the racial Other. These collisions can be defined, according to literary theorist Mary Louise Pratt, as “contact zones,” or “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths” (34). The very definition of contact zones, however, remains malleable: a reflection of the very zones it attempts to describe, a term “best characterized as a process that is ongoing, unstable, and resistant to simple explanation” (Hall and Rosner 96). It is impossible to describe the boundaries of a contact zone or restrict the characteristics of a contact zone’s members. As a whole, it is safe to consider contact zones as spaces of cultural friction and ambiguity, points of perennial transition from one culture to another. The contact zone is a gap between polarized descriptions of society.

Captivity narratives are rife with societal gaps, both personal and universal. For example, Iroquois mourning war seeks to fill a gap in a Native American society while, at the same time, creating a gap in the society from which they take their captives. Captivity narratives, however, often focused on erasing gaps rather than illuminating them. These narratives were developments of “the patriarchal and imperialistic stratum” which imposed strict cultural binaries enforced by the “hegemonic cultural model” of the superior society (Ortells Montón 76). Just one among many captivity narratives that spanned the late-seventeenth through eighteenth century American literary period is that of Eunice Williams, related in John Demos’ biography of Williams, *The Unredeemed Captive: A Family Story from Early America*. Williams’ narrative— like Jemison’s— is a story of adoption through Iroquois mourning war. In 1704, Williams was taken, along with two siblings and her father, when she was seven-years-old by the Mohawk tribe. Williams went on to live the rest of her life in Mohawk society where she entirely “forgot her prior existence” (Alfred 250).

Williams' narrative, although it can be seen as a seamless assimilation into Native American culture, highlights instead the losses of her prior culture. Thus, she is forever "unredeemed" rather than an adopted member of a new family. Rather than embracing Williams as member of shared cultures, she must be considered one or the other. The same is true for James Smith, whose tale of attempted adoption is chronicled in his autobiography *An account of the remarkable occurrences in the life and travels of Colonel James Smith*. Smith was a young man taken by the Mohawks in 1755. Smith, unlike Williams, was not contented to fill his place in Mohawk society and soon fled his captors to return home, only to find himself and his home changed during the time he was away. The ending of Smith's narrative, when he finds himself ill-fit for his pre-captivity position in society, introduces another theme of captivity, that of a captive who has to refill a gap in society after a time away from that society, a time that is now unbridgeable by cultural difference because the settler colony demands strict cultural binaries not infringed upon by Native American culture.

The narrative of Mary Rowlandson, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, notable because it is considered the canonical first of the captivity narrative genre, is an example of a captive's attempt to climb her way back out of a traumatic captivity experience into her prior position in society. Unlike Jemison, Williams, or Smith, Rowlandson was not captured with the intention of adoption into the tribe, but as a prisoner of the King Philip's War with the ultimate goal of ransoming her back to her New England society. Mary Rowlandson's experience with a societal gap revolves around being removed from her place in her household, with her strict Puritan societal and religious structure, to occupy the place of captive among a race of people she considered inferior. After her release back to her husband, Rowlandson was then forced to inhabit the gap in the society she had been violently taken away from, but she was now displaced by her experiences during captivity so that she no longer seemed to fit as neatly into the role society

prescribed for her. The narrative of Mary Jemison is also written in a time in which cultural ambiguity was not permitted. Yet, all of these captivity narratives— Williams, Smith, Rowlandson, and Jemison— cannot be understood fully without allowing for a space of cultural ambiguity, a gap between societies, the aforementioned contact zone, which permits people to relate to more than one cultural identity.

Cultural gaps make themselves known in a narrative, what postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha refers to as “the emergence of the interstices,” when there is a cultural exchange of any kind, or an “overlap and displacement of domains of difference.” Overlaps and displacements create spaces in which “the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated.” People who find themselves within these spaces experience what Bhabha further terms “cultural hybridity.” Cultural hybridity is often the result of an “imposed hierarchy.” Subjects find themselves between the tiers of a societal pyramid where they become resistant to “paranoid classification,” or any kind of stringent cultural definition, and unable to be defined by the cultural categorization of superior or inferior culture which the dominant culture attempts to impress upon them (Bhabha 2-4, 113). In the case of Native American captivity narratives, cultural hybridity is often introduced through the violent dichotomy of so-called “superior” and “inferior” cultures typical in a colonized territory. The early American settlers, the colonizers, were intent on becoming the dominant culture, whereas the indigenous peoples, the colonized Native Americans, were considered the inferior, savage culture that needed to be tempered by superior European ideals. Cultural friction was especially prevalent in Native American captivity narratives because this social dynamic of the superior colonizer and inferior colonized was seemingly inverted: Native Americans became the captors and the former colonizer was now essentially subverted to the position of captive. Captivity narratives were focused on

correcting that inversion, on the “cultural and racial differences faced and eventually overcome by captives” in that the most important aspect of captivity narratives was the assumption that a captive needed to “return to the Anglo-American settlement” (Wyss). The Native American colonial subject was seen as the dark Other, a foil to European superiority. Native American captives ran the risk of being tarnished, whether religiously, culturally, or sexually, by the inferior Other, and their rescue from such a situation was paramount to the preservation of the colony.

Postcolonial theory explains how Native Americans, and many other indigenous groups, were designated to the spot of inferior Other within the colonial structure. The American colonies were somewhat unique among colonial enterprises in that they were settler colonies, not present only for a time to inhabit a place for its resources, but there with the intention of populating the land. Theorist Patrick Wolfe elucidates that “settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event” (388). The settler colony, if it was to eventually overtake the native population, needed to individuate and legitimize the colony’s authority, “to express its difference—and, accordingly, its independence— from the mother country” (Wolfe 389). Settler colonies, because they eventually entirely overtake an indigenous people and become the dominant population, can be occasionally ignored in the larger discourse of postcolonial studies, despite the fact that many of the theories of postcolonialism apply to settler colonies just as they apply to franchise colonialism. Colonial expansion was often based on the exclusive humanist philosophy of Immanuel Kant, who argued for a “categorical imperative” in that “man alone, and with him every rational creature, is an end in himself” (qtd. in Spivak 248). Human beings, as rational, could not be seen as a means to reach an end as, for example, an animal might be, but had to be seen as agentive ends in and of themselves. Kant’s categorical imperative inadvertently created a loophole for colonialism with its suggestion that, to be considered human, one must be wholly rational, with

rationality defined under the typical Western structure of modernity. Postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak articulates how the categorical imperative was given to “justify the imperialist project by producing the following formula: make the heathen into a human so that he can be treated as an end in himself” (Spivak 248). It is this exact kind of moralist-based imperialism, what Edward Said terms “imperialist philanthropy” (more commonly known as the “civilizing mission” of the white man), that gave an ethical excuse for colonial expansion, otherwise purely based on stripping a land and people of resources (Said xviii). The project of “humanizing” an Other runs headlong into a paradox, however, as soon as the “heathen” is deemed less-than human. If the colonized subject becomes a nonhuman, the colonists can then “self the Other,” a process that “consolidates the imperialist self” (Spivak 253). The identity of a colony, especially a settler colony— which seeks to declare a self-governing identity separate from the motherland— must be preserved by asserting authority over an inferior Other. Thus, the colony was not defined by what it was, but by what it was *not*— in other words, the savage, inferior native. The Other, even under the pretense of a categorical imperative-based civilizing mission, is used as a means to the colony’s end.

Out of this dichotomy of superior and inferior cultures comes a paranoia about cultural purity that leads to a strict estrangement of the Other from the dominant culture, which, in turn, creates an uneasiness toward any who attempt— either intentionally or unintentionally— to traverse cultural boundaries. A cultural hybrid becomes a product of colonial attitudes, for a hybrid is relegated to a space outside of either culture, not tolerated in the dominant culture once there has been contact with an inferior culture. Yet, to say that captivity narratives that result in the adoption of the captive into a Native American tribe, like those narratives of Eunice Williams, Mary Jemison, and— to an extent— James Smith, allow for a version of cultural hybridity or

assimilation less fraught by cultural friction is to ignore the other cultural nuances that occurred within such an exchange. June Namias asserts in her introduction to *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* that Jemison was “a very real figure affirming the possibility that whites and Indians might have lived together peacefully, and an example of those things that went wrong” (43). It is possible to think of Mary Jemison’s narrative as a demonstration of accepted cultural difference while also taking into account those things that “went wrong”—not necessarily in Namias’ sense of the phrase: the persistently poorly handled relationship between the American settlers and American’s indigenous population—but what “went wrong” with the cultural assimilation found in Native American adoption as a whole. Iroquois mourning war was fueled by a motive perhaps more utilitarian than sympathetic, focused simply on “restoring lost population, ensuring social continuity,” or otherwise bridging a gap left behind by tragedy (Richter 70). When Eunice Williams, for example, entered the Mohawk community, she was fulfilling a specific role in their society, but, even as she was adopted into the Native American culture, it cannot be forgotten that her family had also lost their seven-year-old daughter for what turned out to be forever. Thus, another gap is created even as the first is plugged. It is impossible to examine Williams’ or Jemison’s cultural exchange from American settler to adopted member of a Native American community without also acknowledging that, to be one, they could not be the other. Cultural exchange in the Iroquois adoption ritual may have been less uneasy than it was in the settler communities, but it does not necessarily indicate a positive transition from one culture to another or a peaceful recognition of the amalgamation of two cultures. Instead, it was a complete erasure of cultural difference, a severing rather than a merger, a cultural exchange that resulted in one community gaining a member and the other community losing a member. Both the attitudes of the



colonizer and the colonized toward culture required an adjustment to allow for cultural hybridity, a space in which people could reside without the pressure of two conflicting cultural identities.

### **Cultural Assimilation and its Losses: Eunice Williams and James Smith**

Iroquois mourning war came out of an Iroquoian understanding of society in that “Vacant positions in Iroquois families and villages were [...] both literally and symbolically filled, and the continuity of Iroquois society was confirmed” (Richter 71). Iroquois culture differed from a colonial culture preoccupied with a social and racial “purity” in that Iroquois tribes were more concerned with maintaining the strength of their society and often filled gaps in their societies with people “not necessarily [...] of their own race, in the way that we understand race today, [and] not necessarily their own people.” There were many captivity experiences in which captives in a “mourning situation” were “taken in and treated as sons, as daughters, as chiefs in some instances who in fact were British soldiers the week before or a couple of months before” (Alfred 248). Iroquoian society was filled up by individuals in utilitarian positions with direct roles to play in society. The purpose behind captive-taking in a mourning war was to fill a gap in society, not separate it further, for “what mattered was not the fate of the individual captive but the restoration of the community’s well-being” (Haefeli and Sweeney 24).

Eunice Williams was captured during the Deerfield Massacre of Queen Anne’s War in an instance of Iroquois mourning war. Williams never recorded a personal account of her captivity, so her life has been filled in piecemeal from other sources. John Demos renders the scene of Williams’ capture in his work *The Unredeemed Captive*. Demos quotes from a letter by Solomon Stoddard, a man who witnessed the event, which leaves no doubt of the Native Americans’ brutality in the initial attack on Deerfield that would eventually lead to the complete separation of

Williams from her family: “they don’t appear openly in the field to bid us battle, [and] they use those cruelly that fall into their hands. They act like wolves, and are to be dealt withal as wolves” (qtd. in Demos 14). This scene contrasts strikingly with the kindness Williams is shown later at the hands of her Mohawk captors. Williams’ story is one of the better known of Native American captivity narratives because her father, John Williams, was also captured during the raid. He released his own narrative after the nearly three-year experience of captivity, *The Redeemed Captive Returning to Zion*. John Williams explains how he was ransomed back to white society and mourned the loss of his daughter Eunice to the Native Americans. At the end of his narrative, John begs for his readers’ prayers for Eunice’s deliverance from her captors, explaining, “I have yet a daughter of ten years of age and many neighbors whose case bespeaks your compassion and prayers to God to gather them, being outcasts ready to perish” (Williams 225). John Williams’ desperation to see his daughter again is emblematic of the forgotten result of adoption narratives, that of the gap left behind in the captive’s previous life, thus Eunice Williams’ legacy becomes focused on her absence from white society rather than her entrance into Native American society.

Williams was taken to fill the gap in a Mohawk tribe left behind by the death of a child. The story of her introduction into Mohawk society may be inaccurate or myth, but apparently Williams was taken in by a mother who “had been rendered inconsolable by the death of an infant daughter,” purported to have died of smallpox. This mother was “so much born down with’ the loss, ‘some of her relations predicted that she could not survive long’” if there was not some kind of intervention. Williams was noticed by this mother and introduced into the family, where the other members were “instructed to treat her as one of the family” (Haefeli and Sweeney 24). The young Eunice Williams was readily adopted into the tribe and she lived out the rest of her life there, marrying a Mohawk man and having three children with him, who went on to have many

grandchildren over the course of her life. Williams, perhaps because of her age or the fact that the family who adopted her “took a serious liking or saw something in the child” that reminded them of their lost loved-one, did not experience some of the cruelties described in other captivity narratives (Alfred 250). Williams was reportedly treated well from the beginning. Her father wrote that she “was carried all the journey [after her capture] and looked after with a great deal of tenderness” (Williams 179). A descendant of Williams, Taiaiake Alfred, muses that it was this care that prompted Williams to remain in the community “until she was eighty-nine years old and [die] a member of our community” (250).

Williams, despite her father’s and Demos’ focus on her absence from white society, became the archetype of a successful Native American adoption, an occasion that illustrates for Alfred “the Mohawks’ ability and desire to assimilate all sorts of people into their community.” Race was inconsequential in an adoption, only “culture and community membership” mattered, for “Mohawks themselves decided who was a Mohawk” (Alfred 245). John Williams, however, describes how his daughter Eunice’s transition from American settler to Mohawk cultures was not entirely smooth, despite the eventual results. John Williams describes an interaction with his young daughter in a rare occasion when he was able to see her during their shared captivity. Williams told her father that she yet remembered her Puritan catechism and wished to be rescued from her captors for they “profaned God’s Sabbaths” and performed other blasphemies. John Williams told her that “she must pray to God for his grace every day” and must not forget her catechism or scriptures, but Eunice was afraid that she would forget for she had “none to instruct her” (Williams 189). In the end, Williams would forget, just as she forgot her native English in favor of the Mohawk language, yet another indication of a cultural exchange unwilling to allow room for

cultural hybridity or ambiguity. Williams was Mohawk because the tribe had decided it as such and would never again be European.

The decision to transition from American settler to member of a Mohawk community was often an uneasy one, as seen in the case of Eunice Williams. Yet, Williams' end result appears to be a relatively smooth assimilation of culture, eventually switching from one culture to another with little lingering friction. This was not always the case. James Smith was an instance of transition that never resulted in complete cultural assimilation. Smith was eighteen-years-old and a colonel in the Pennsylvania militia when he was captured by a "sachem," a leader, of a Mohawk tribe in 1755. He witnessed several of his fellow captives tortured and killed by the Mohawks and he, himself, was forced to run the gauntlet. After these trials, however, he underwent an adoption ceremony that would allow him to enter the tribe fully as a fellow Mohawk. Smith describes this process as being both frightening and painful. Smith explains, in *An Account of the Remarkable Occurrences in the Life and Travels of Colonel James Smith*, how the adoption ritual began when all the hair was removed from his head, except for a small patch on the crown of his head, which was set with braids and feathers. One Mohawk coated his fingers in ashes "in order to take the firmer hold," pulling out Smith's hair "as if he had been plucking a turkey." Smith's ears and nose were then pierced and he was made to replace his clothes with a breechclout. His skin was painted and he was given a wampum necklace. Smith had never seen a Mohawk adoption ceremony before and, as he had just witnessed many of his companions put to violent deaths, he was afraid the same was going to be done to him. He was led to the river and instructed to submerge himself, but he was afraid he was being drowned until he was reassured by a woman, one of the only Mohawks present who could speak a little English, that the Native Americans were to "no hurt you" (13-14). After these ceremonies, Smith was taken by the hand by the chief, who gave "a moving speech

indicating that all the white blood had been washed out of this man's veins. He was in fact no longer a white man, he was a member of [the chief's] family; he was his son." From that point onward, Smith "should forget his prior existence" for "he was a member of a proud nation and a proud family. And he should take pride in that fact and make the best of his existence and learn his responsibilities within Mohawk society" (Alfred 249). Smith was renamed Scoouwas and now supposed to fully accept his position in the Mohawk society, entirely discarding his previous life (Smith 14).

For years, James Smith gave every indication that he had assimilated smoothly into the Mohawk lifestyle, living with the tribe and performing his cultural responsibilities. In one instance, early on in his captivity, when he was trusted to leave the camp by himself, he went out to hunt buffalo but became lost in the forest. He was rescued the next day and when he asked a Mohawk named Solomon if "he thought I was running away, "Solomon replied, "no no, you go too much cloaked," referring to the fact that Smith had been travelling too erratically in the forest to suggest escape (Smith 24). At one point, Smith lost several books he had acquired, but these books were later returned to him, an occurrence that Smith described as

the first time that I felt my heart warm towards the Indians. Though they had been exceeding kind to me, I still before detested them, on account of the barbarity I beheld after Braddock's defeat. Neither had I ever before pretended kindness, or expressed myself in a friendly manner; but I began now to excuse the Indians on account of their want of information. (Smith 40)

This dawning sense of belonging was swiftly eclipsed by another instance of cultural uneasiness when the Mohawks captured several other prisoners. These prisoners were forced to run the gauntlet, just as Smith had been forced to. This time, however, Smith was on the other side of the

practice, not just an observer, but a participant in the abuse. He threw a pumpkin at one of the prisoners running between the lines of Native Americans, which hit the man and “pleased the Indians much” (Smith 50). Smith was shocked that he had partaken in the violence that once so abhorred him from the Mohawks.

Smith’s apparent assimilation did not last much longer. Four years after his time with the Mohawks, he traveled with his adopted brother, Tecaughretanego, to Detroit. While there, he escaped to a French ship that carried several English prisoners. He exchanged one kind of captivity for another and spent four months in a French prison with his English companions. In 1760, he finally made his way back to his hometown. There is little in Smith’s narrative that suggests his motivation behind his bid for freedom, except for the fact that his position in the Mohawk community, chosen for him, had not been a role Smith was willing to play. He returned, instead, to his home town, only to find home was not exactly as he had left it, just as he was no longer the same. “His people,” as he referred to his English family and friends, were “surprised to see me so much like an Indian, both in my gait and gesture.” Also, his old “sweet-heart” had been married to another man only days before Smith’s return home (Smith 98-99). The fact that James Smith attempted and eventually succeeded in escaping from his captors is an indication that cultural assimilation is a two-way street. If there is to be full cultural adoption it must be accepted by both the Native American population and the colonial captive. Adoption through a mourning war, then, becomes not a seamless cultural intermingling without any hint of hybridity or unease, but the total cultural exchange with, perhaps, as little room for cultural hybridity as experienced by those captives who return to European colonial society.

### **The Incomplete Homecoming of Mary Rowlandson**

James Smith's unsatisfying homecoming resembles the homecoming of another captive, Mary Rowlandson. Mary Rowlandson's 1675 captivity narrative, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, is emblematic of many of the cultural fissures that emerge from cultural intersections, including the exploration of gender roles, religious propaganda, and the perennial displacement that results from a prolonged interaction with another culture. Rowlandson was captured in a raid on her town by an Algonquin-speaking tribe, the Wampanoags, during the King Philip's War of 1675–78. The raid resulted in the destruction of her house, death of her youngest child, Sarah, and the captivity of two of her other children. Rowlandson would eventually spend time as the captive of chief Metacom, nicknamed King Philip by the European colonizers, and the person for which King Philip's War was named. Rowlandson was eventually returned to her home and husband when she was "redeemed" for twenty-pounds from her Native American captors. Her homecoming, however, becomes an incomplete reentrance into a way of life abandoned for nearly three months. During her captivity, Rowlandson entered a literal and figurative homelessness, separated from her family, society, religion, and culture and violently introduced to the unfamiliar, hostile, and perceptively inferior culture of her enemies. Rowlandson's account is structured in twenty "removes," as her captors transport their camp throughout the New England wilderness in an incessant, unsettling transition—a physical removal that mirrors Rowlandson's separation from her previous life and society. Rowlandson's identity prior to captivity was built solely around the home. She was first and foremost a wife and mother within a household, identities that were lost as soon as she was removed from the home into the wilderness, where she is "bereft of her social identity, lost in a spiritual wilderness that calls into question familiar hierarchies of social, racial and spiritual meaning" (Logan qtd. in Jin 127). Rowlandson has been separated from her place in society by captivity, and now that she attempts to fit back into the gap she left behind, she

finds she can no longer slip easily back into her roles. She has entered the fissure between the strict margins of Native American and European cultures and become what Homi Bhabha would refer to as a cultural hybrid.

As a Puritan woman, Rowlandson is used to living under the authority of men and her religion. She belongs to a fixed gender-role in which she “could not enter a contract, acquire property, or write a will; her role as a wife and mother determined her social function” (Jin 128). This situation, however, alters in her captivity when she is allowed “an economic independence that permits her a kind of temporary escape from patriarchal subordination.” Rowlandson demonstrates economic independence through her work as a seamstress in the Native American community and her many instances of trading for food or other resources throughout the narrative, even the fixing of her own twenty-pound ransom price (Burnham 33). Rowlandson’s captivity, “for all that it demonstrates loyalty to fathers,” becomes not a straightforward transition from one authority to another but “also represents a separation [...] even a testing of, the fathers’ legitimacy that nonetheless eventuates in a safe return to their authority” (Toulouse 324-325). Rowlandson, among the Native Americans, experienced capitalist autonomy, something that is once again lost to her when she returns home, yet another jarring cultural difference that prevents her from assimilating back into her culture.

Often in the case of captivity narratives, textual discrepancies appear in the retelling of a narrative, either through biography or the captive’s own hand. It was in the recording and reading of captivity narratives that most often cultural uneasiness made itself known, primarily through the manipulation of fact in order to mold a captivity narrative to a certain purpose— whether for religious or colonial propaganda. In the case of Mary Rowlandson’s narrative, the presence of narrative control from the Puritan Minister Increase Mather impresses itself upon the narrative and



introduces a double-voicedness to the narrative that contributes to the uneasiness of Rowlandson's identity overall. It cannot be said that Rowlandson's narrative is entirely wrested away from her by Increase Mather, assumed author of the preface of Rowlandson's work and perhaps contributor to the text, for to do so would be to ignore Rowlandson's individual agency in deciding to write her narrative. Yet it cannot be denied that Rowlandson's entire narrative has been constructed within a Puritan framework—a story that is aligned to a biblical parable of God's redemption and faithfulness through trials, reflected in the title *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*. Mary Rowlandson's tale functions under the religious typological algorithm of Puritan captives as religious pietists who resist the corrupting influence of Native American "agents of Satan." A captor who upholds their conviction in the face of this spiritual struggle transforms from an individual captive to a metonym for "the integrity of the New England project as a whole" (Burnham 15). Rowlandson's ransom, termed a "redemption," becomes indicative both of the money spent to free her and the spiritual contest she has withstood.

The religious schematic of Rowlandson's narrative is meant to be a simple one. Yet, at the end of her ordeal, Rowlandson struggles both to assert her autonomy over her story and to transform her tale into a tidy sermon on the prevailing mercy of God and inarguable brutality of her captors. Rowlandson maintains that she initially transcribed her account "that I may the better declare what happened to me during the grievous Captivity," a statement that becomes questionable as soon as a religious edifice is placed atop her narrative (Rowlandson 70). The dehumanization of the Native American captors in Rowlandson's narrative, a key to the success of her religious analogy, is weakened by the interior contradictions of the treatment of Native Americans within her text. It is impossible for Rowlandson to portray a strictly negative image of her captors in a narrative that professes to speak the truth, and she records many instances of

kindness displayed by the Native Americans only to hastily classify these events as “the good providence of God” (Rowlandson 87). Literary critic Michelle Burnham explains how “her record of an Indian’s sympathy and generosity” inevitably leads to a paradox between her truthful retelling and religious rendering (whether influenced by Mather or not) when she still maintains “the universality of Indian savagery and barbarity.” Burnham further asserts that the interior incongruence within Rowlandson’s narrative is symptomatic of a “surplus” in her “cultural exchange” between her colonial lifestyle to her time as a captive among the Native Americans (17, 21). Neither is Rowlandson able to assimilate totally to her captors, superimposed as the religious antithesis to her Puritan ideals, nor is she able to settle into her European homecoming. She has become a cultural hybrid, unable to step back in time to her life before captivity and incapable of erasing the unconscious sympathies toward her captors she accrued during her time in captivity.

The religious commodification of Mary Rowlandson’s story also had a colonial end, seeking to revert the idea of a “Noble Savage” of the Native American into a strictly negative position of “cruel American heathen savages” (Bauer 672). The possibility “that Rowlandson, herself, both directly and inadvertently, nonetheless expresses anger at, if not a repudiation of, traditional Puritan readings and understandings of her experience” is further evidence of the contrasting voices that speak within her work (Toulouse 322). One of these voices is that of Mary Rowlandson, herself, attempting to assert ownership and truth over her own life after she was turned into human property by her captives— whether this was through an assertion of truth or the deliberate recommodification of self— and the other is Mather’s, “who propagated the captive’s histories for didactic purposes of his own” (Jin 126). Her narrative is suspended between cross-purposes, both to illuminate the truth and also to act as religious and colonial propaganda. Despite Rowlandson’s eventually homecoming, her identity becomes split between her previous

position as a housewife and her time as a Native American captive. She can never fully return to her old life because of her experiences and unwilling knowledge of the Native American tribe that held her captive.

Rowlandson's cultural hybridity is further complicated by her identity as a member of a settler colony struggling to assert autonomy from the motherland. Before Rowlandson was captured by Metacom's tribe, she was already an object of cultural dislocation. Rowlandson's captivity narrative takes place in late-seventeenth-century, pre-revolutionary America when it still existed as a British colony. Rowlandson, as a second-generation colonizer, experiences a second degree of separation from her European Puritan precursors, and exists as a "colonial American creole," who writes from "the margins of an imperial, Eurocentric, geocultural imagination." Rowlandson struggles not only to separate herself from the legacy of her captivity by asserting her own voice, but also to "negotiate a 'cognitive space' within a European literary tradition that had been inventing America as 'colonial space' in countless sixteenth- and seventeenth-century travel narratives and imperial histories" (Bauer 666-667). Upon Rowlandson's ransom, she not only had to return to her abandoned place in the household, but also had to assert herself as an author under the European gaze within the colonial location of American. What was at stake was the accusation that the New England colonies "had failed in their mission to convert the Indians," and in fact the initial European civilizing mission had now manifested in open hostility, a reflection of a "crime of such degenerate English, who with that air, have imbibed the Barbarity and Heathenism of the countries they live in" (Godwin qtd. in Bauer 671). Rowlandson had the weight of colonialism on her shoulders, a pressure to formulate her cultural identity in such a way that would show her Puritan leaders that she had remained resolute in her faith during her ordeal while also combatting

the assumption that the American settlers had absorbed the very brutality from the indigenous peoples the colony had initially been sent to cleanse.

Rowlandson pondered at the end of her narrative, “I can remember the time, when I used to sleep quietly without workings in my thoughts, whole nights together, but now it is other ways with me” (111). This is a somber close to a traumatic period in her life. Burnham explains how Rowlandson’s tears at the end of her account “indicates not only grief or trauma but a frightening realization that English supremacy is less stable and English victory less assured than this Englishwoman once believed. These tears mark precisely one moment when typology threatens to fail” (35). Mary Rowlandson’s experience with cultural hybridity has been informed throughout by the imperial attitudes of the superior colonizer and inferior colonized subject in need of civilizing. Rowlandson is now unable to experience life within the strict cultural binaries as she had been accustomed to before her captivity. Despite the significance of Rowlandson’s homecoming, the past events of her captivity lurk in the background of her narrative as a kind of chronic homelessness, an ambivalence of identity that cannot be put to rest by her own, or Mather’s, hand. She is caught in a cultural gap which becomes a space of cultural hybridity from which she cannot return.

### **Mary Jemison and the Importance of Cultural Hybridity**

Perhaps most striking in Rowlandson’s experience with cultural hybridity and, indeed, in the experiences of James Smith and Eunice Williams, are the negative effects of experiencing hybridity in cultures that are unwilling to accept any kind of cultural ambiguity. It is tempting to conclude from these three narratives that both American settlers and Native American cultures were equally reluctant to accept any kind of cultural hybridity within their societies due to their

views of anything but cultural dichotomy as threatening to society as a whole. At first glance, the narrative of Mary Jemison also seems to fit into the same cultural dichotomy enforced by other captivity narratives, as her story lives on as either the tragic tale of a white woman captured by brutal Native Americans or the life of “the fully-fledged Seneca woman who managed to circulate a long history of white prejudices and Euro-American encroachment”— both of which fall into strict cultural boundaries (Ortells Montón 76, 81). Yet indications within Mary Jemison’s narrative suggest that she cannot be categorized so stringently. Her eventual assimilation into the tribe of her Seneca captors, combined with the retention of many of the characteristics of the Irish immigrant family she was taken from, is indicative of a more forgiving attitude toward cultural hybridity, one where the paranoid cultural classification seen in Rowlandson, Williams, and Smith’s narrative does not seem to exist so prevalently. In its place, Jemison occupies “a liminal position between two worlds and moving between fixed identities” (Ortells Montón 81).

Jemison was taken from her Pennsylvania home in 1755 when she was twelve-years-old and would go on to live the rest of her life among the Seneca tribe. Jemison was adopted to replace a lost son, and Jemison recounts— filtered through the voice of her transcriber, James Seaver— how the family’s grief gave way to joy following her adoption ceremony:

In the course of that ceremony, from mourning they became serene— joy sparkled in their countenances, and they seemed to rejoice over me as over a long lost child. I was made welcome amongst them as a sister to the two Squaws [...] I afterward learned that the ceremony I at that time passed through, was that of adoption. The two squaws had lost a brother in Washington’s war, sometime in the year before. (Seaver 77)

Jemison was renamed Degiwene and is still known in the Iroquois community as such. Degiwene means “two falling voices” or “two-voices-falling,” referring to the fact that she would

learn to speak the Seneca language but, unlike Eunice Williams, would also preserve her ability to speak English (Namias 43). The name “Degiwene” is also an indication of her identity within the contact zone of European and Native American cultures. Jemison’s name demands further interpretation when considering her blended identity and the multiple interpretations her narrative would eventually inspire among its readers. Jemison’s narrative, like Rowlandson’s before her, demonstrates the same textual ambiguity that arises from a narrative is handled by more than one author. A narrative such as Jemison’s, written by Seaver, boasts a narrative of many layers and often reveals inconsistent or outright contradictory aims in its execution: a gap between the intentions of two different authors. Conflicting authorial purpose resulted in multiple interpretations of the text, also contributing to a legacy of cultural ambiguity that persisted outside of the personal experience of the captive and traveled outward to how society as a whole could handle and understand cultural hybridity. Narratives such as Jemison’s create smaller pockets of hybridity, contact zones within the confines of the cover of a book. Jemison’s readers perceived her narrative in many different ways: to many her story was “a nonfictional version of *The Last of the Mohicans*, documenting pioneer fortitude and the ‘decline’ of Indian life,” but it also became “a story of bravery, a work of sentiment, a morality play, propaganda against Indian barbarity and in support of U.S. expansion, an ethnography, a tribute to white western settlers, and a children’s story” (Namias 4, 33).

Jemison’s narrative would also become known as an “authentic” account of Native American life. Her narrative gained publication from James Seaver in 1824, a period of American history in which many Native American tribes were being removed from their lands in the interest of American territorial expansion. Yet, in the midst of Native American “eradication,” there was also a push for white authors to appropriate and “valorize” Native American stories for white

readership. Mary Jemison's own narrative reacted to this impulse as she came to be known as an object of white gaze upon an exoticized Native American (Wyss). Jemison's narrative was notably altered under Seaver's pen. Seaver was particularly interested in molding Jemison into a "romantic figure, a white Indian of the woods, connecting Americans of the Victorian age with the sacrifices of early frontier settlement." Her narrative conformed to the colonial "interest in the exotic." The illustrations in the original edition, Mary sowing corn with other Seneca women, were adapted into similar images in children's literature and ushered readers into "an exciting and foreign world" (Namias 41-43). Yet, trying to categorize Jemison as an Indian once again enforces a strict cultural apartheid rather than embracing her status as a cultural hybrid.

Jemison's identity as Native American is complicated because it was largely based on imposed definitions of the white readership of her narrative. This definition is grounded in "specific genres of written discourse—the captivity narrative, the travel narrative, European eyewitness accounts of 'authentic' Native communities," where authenticity is wholly reliant upon the white gaze (Wyss). Postcolonial theorist Graham Huggan explores the way authenticity is perceived in works of ethnic autobiography and biography. He explains that "ethnic autobiography, like ethnicity itself, flourishes under the watchful eye of the dominant culture; both are caught in the dual processes of commodification and surveillance" and that authenticity in minority biography—like that of Mary Jemison—is based off the dominant culture's voyeuristic impulses toward the minority culture (155). Authenticity is the dominant culture's fetish, a preoccupation to discover authenticity in another culture lost to the dominant culture. The authenticity of Native American captivity narratives was often used as a commodity or "the currency at play in the marketplace of cultural difference" (Root qtd. in Huggans). Even the authenticity in Jemison's narrative becomes a part of culture that cannot be wholly aligned under

the pressures of colonial manipulation: a fissure yawning between truth and a desired colonial reading, yet another gap within society's contact zones. The very fact that authenticity was craved in Jemison's narrative, as a confirmation of her native identity, is indicative of another enforced cultural value. Still, despite Jemison's many indications of cultural hybridity, she is not allowed to exist between two cultures, but must be forced into one or the other.

There are internal contradictions within Seaver's account of Jemison, for, even as he attempts to exoticize her as a Native Other, he also attempts to emphasize Native American brutality, rejecting the idea that Jemison could have willingly assimilated into the Seneca tribe. Erasing Jemison's agency in deciding her own identity, he molds her into the form of "innocent girl-child" captured by savages, seen as a victim who "must submit as a woman to the 'savagery' of the racial 'other'" (Wyss). Jemison is romanticized and often sexualized, simultaneously preserved as the white settler woman threatened by racial Others and exoticized as a Native American woman. Native Americans were ordinarily perceived by American settlers as either the noble warrior figure or the brutal savage. Native American women, however, quickly took on the "third image" of "an exotic and sexual native." Jemison's narrative especially stood out as a gendered narrative which explored "a white woman in a near yet foreign world, and in her case, in a world that she learns to accept as her own" (Namias 11-17). Jemison's narrative, instead of accepting an exoticized legacy as an inevitability, puts its gendered perspective to good use, latching onto a potentially exoticist audience to persuade them to a more positive outlook on cultural hybridity. Because Jemison "appeals to her audience in a call to recognize her dilemmas as a woman and as a white woman between two cultures" her eventual acceptance of those entwined cultures and alignment with the supposed inferior culture of the Senecas becomes the shared conclusion of the readers of the text. Jemison's narrative questions the depiction of a



sexualized, weak Native American woman, bringing to light the fact that Seneca women were, in fact, the locus of the family, where, upon marriage, men moved in with the wife's family as opposed to the gender roles that existed in the American settler cultures. Seneca women "had extensive power" including political, economic, social, and medical knowledges (Namias 17-20).

Jemison resists these interpretive readings within her own narrative, a voice combatting Seaver's from within the text, refusing to be culturally categorized even by the man who writes her story. Jemison would grow up in the Seneca tribe and eventually marry a man named Sheninjee, with whom she had one child before his death. She named her child Thomas, in the memory of her father left behind years before after her capture. Jemison is unlike Eunice Williams in this way, for she pays active homage to her previous identity by naming her child after her father whereas Williams substituted her identity entirely for the culture of the Mohawks. The fact that she named her children after her white family and kept her own name, Jemison, is a preservation of "her Irish forebears" and "shows some ambivalence about which group she finally identifies as her own family" (Wyss). Jemison's name is an indication of her choice of mixed cultural identity, which is ultimately a deliberate choice. Jemison later remarried a man named Hiakatoo and had six more children. After the Revolutionary War, Jemison was told by her Seneca brother, Kaujisestaugeau, that she could return home to her European people. Jemison was tempted, but she decided against it because, by then "I had got a large family of Indian children, that I must take with me; and that if I should be so fortunate as to find my relatives, they would despise them, if not myself; and treat us as enemies; or, at least with a degree of [...] indifference" (Seaver 120). Jemison dictated her own cultural identity, an identity forced by colonial attitudes, but nonetheless refused to be swayed by interpretations of her narrative.

### **Conclusion: Understanding Captivity Narratives Through Cultural Hybridity**

Jemison's life story is a "'failed' captivity narrative" in that it is not a story of a woman who returns to her rightful culture after a time in captivity, but "Jemison transforms herself from a Christian Anglo-American girl to a Native American woman, thereby transgressing the racial categories of the genre" (Wyss). Jemison embraces the mutability of her cultural identities in a way that Mary Rowlandson, James Smith, or Eunice Williams do not. Mary Jemison's narrative calls into doubt the fact that Native American adoption through a mourning war called for a strict severance of past colonial life. Her narrative reveals another kind of double-voice, a bilingual and more accepting idea of culture in which a woman who was called "two falling voices" could thrive. Jemison's narrative "cannot fit neatly into the textual forms established by an Anglo-American culture", thus, her narrative "mirror[s] the complexities of living 'in-between'" cultures (Wyss). Captivity narratives were rife with cultural frictions spurred by the dichotomy between the "superior" colonial culture and "inferior" Native American culture. The fact that Mary Rowlandson experienced difficulty in re-assimilating into her colonial lifestyle, James Smith struggled in accepting his new situation as a member of a Mohawk community, and Eunice Williams departed from her past life entirely suggests Native American ideas about cultural hybridity may have been just as polarizing as European colonial ideas. Neither culture accepted an ambiguous cultural identity but insisted upon strict boundaries between the two. One was either an American settler or a Native American; there was no room for an uncertain contact zone in between, and those who found themselves in that fissure between cultures were often doomed to a life of uneasy cultural identity. Mary Jemison, on the other hand, learned to exist peacefully within her new culture while retaining some aspects of her previous culture, becoming a double-voiced figure in and of herself, representative of both American settler and Native American,

impossible to fully understand without the theory of cultural hybridity. Figures such as Jemison, critiqued without the use of cultural hybridity, find themselves allocated to strict definitions of culture, their individual social identities erased by the need to categorize, forever lost to the paranoid classification of cultures outlined by colonialism.

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