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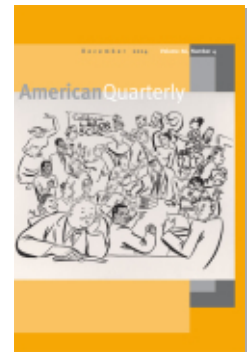
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From White into Red: Captivity Narratives as Alchemies of Race and Citizenship

Audra Simpson

My youngest Daughter, aged *Seven* years, was carryed all the journey, & look'd after with a great deal of Tenderness.

—John Williams, 1707

I mean life is hell there! I mean, it is not the best, I'll be the first to say it, living there, you gotta to be damn tough to live there. And in order to survive there you have to be really tough, now some people might have gotten tired by it, and decided "I'm gonna go live off the reserve where I won't have to deal and face those things on a daily basis, where somebody's telling me, 'leave, you don't belong here'"—facing the discrimination on a daily basis. Which is what we encounter.

—Kahnawake woman, 2003¹

The famous story of Eunice Williams's captivity and incorporation begins with tears and ends with tears, as it was a Mohawk woman's grief that prompted her capture as a replacement child for one lost. Her inconsolability motivated Mohawk warriors from Kahnawake to venture from the southwestern part of the St. Lawrence River down to Deerfield, Massachusetts, in February 1704—during the dead of winter—to take captives.² Little is known of the specificity of the Mohawk woman's unrest, nor of the particulars of her life, as she is referred to only as "the mother."³ Far more is known of Eunice Williams, the white child of completely unambiguous Protestant stock, who would become the woman's child. Eunice was originally the daughter of the Reverend John Williams and Eunice Williams, and thus was the grandniece of famed Puritan minister Increase Mather and cousin to Cotton Mather. With their commitment to piety, anti-popishness, and proper puritan conduct, and in their writing and sermonizing on the sinister condition of Indian captivity, the Mathers have been described by Turner-Strong as "the most prominent divines of their generation."⁴ Williams's life receives its acclaim in part because of these genealogies. But her life is most famous because her captivity became thoroughly consensual and she became, *through time*, a Mohawk herself. She steadfastly refused to return to her natal territory and family. Owing to yawning gulfs in the archives, we do not know what

this conversion tale looked like within Kahnawake, but it is clear from the literature that although originally “English,” Williams became a unilingual, Catholic “white Indian” who was fully assimilated into Mohawk society.

In this essay I use the story of Eunice Williams to think about the ways in which her experience of incorporation and the attention it continues to receive form part of the gendered structure and imaginary of contemporary colonial settler society in North America. As such, I consider the historical and political movement from the first to the second of the two narrative fragments found above. In the first fragment, replete with *tenderness*, we see that a young girl has been treated with great care. Her refusal, and all that it suggested, has prompted the writing of several histories of her captivity. In the second quote a Mohawk woman laments her disenfranchised or internally exiled state within the same community that captured and naturalized the young girl 250 years before. Whereas the community had accepted the white child with such tenderness, the Mohawk woman has been exiled because of the naturalization of her most immediate ancestors as Canadian—a naturalization owing to out-marriage that voided her legal rights as an Indian. The Indian Act (1876) in Canada legally defines who is an “Indian” and so authorized and authorizes the exile and enfranchisement that this article is concerned with.

In the movement from the first quote to the second we may examine the ways in which the structure of refusal, rendered history worthy for racialized and religious reasons (“why would a white child of Protestant stock *choose* to stay among popish Indians?”), prompted much historical and literary scholarship. I am interested less in the refusal of the girl than with the structure of grief that now organizes the gendered questions of political recognition, a structure that seems to push this story of Eunice forward (with the Mohawk woman’s tears) and served to condition citizenship possibilities and experiences for Mohawk women today. It is the disbelieving narratives of her captivity, most important, perhaps, the one written by her father, that moved through time and place to condition citizenship and a certain racial and rights-bearing alchemy that all contemporary Indigenous peoples in Canada live with today. This alchemy was one that became legal, and we may understand as a move from white into red, a social and political moment in North American history wherein such political and legal recognitions were possible. We might reflect upon the ways in which grief, expressed by the historical, nameless figure of the Mohawk woman that prompted this raid, revisits contemporary Mohawk women through their continued disenfranchisement from their natal communities and their citizenships within a settler state, one that visits them through a continued grief.

What of Eunice Williams's story? And how may it condition citizenship and grief? Eunice Williams's story is embedded within her father's classic story of captivity and is more than a story of kidnapping, naturalization, and cultural transgression. Her story enunciates, along with other stories, the gendered and raced preference for social and legal incorporation by settler regimes. These are settler regimes that then became states and so required representations of events such as captivity (which were dramatic episodes of much larger political brokering undertaken by both Indigenous and settler regimes) to justify their existence. But her story also appeals to white settlers' desires to become Indian (even where they were revolted by Indians)—a process that mirrors the *claiming* and *owning* of land. In this way the story of Eunice Williams's life is a shadow logic to that of *claiming* and *owning* land. Even where settlers were frightened by land they claimed it, in perfect Lockean fashion, when it was "occupied" and mixed with labor. In the contemporary landscape, settlers will claim identity where it is mixed with their experience, but it is to historical recognition rather than the moral morass of self-identification that we must turn to first.

To discuss the logics of recognition and conferral in this essay, I rely in part upon the captivity narrative written by Eunice Williams's father John Williams, *The Redeemed Captive* (1707). I do so because much of what we know of her life was framed by this narrative but also the histories that followed it. *The Redeemed Captive* is one of 450 to 500 first-person accounts of captivity that were published in more than 1,200 editions from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth.⁵ These accounts were popular reading at the time, but are returned to today by historians, anthropologists, and literary scholars for historical data. Rather than focus upon their utility in reconstructing the past, I would like to argue that they help us to understand the present—that they have importance for social, political, and feminist analyses of settler society.

Thus, what is important here is more than the motivation for the raid that brought Eunice to Kahnawake; it is the gendered and raced logics that still capture women in the service of a settler project. In order to discern logics of settlement we must do more than talk about military motivations, which are hugely useful in explaining how people and places get shifted around, but these do not answer the critical question of how settlement maintains itself. Cases such as the captivity of Eunice Williams illuminate a problem or crisis for settler societies that legal structures within settler societies are meant to address, namely the incorporation of difference, and the disappearance *or maintenance* of that difference through the legal and juridical frame. The fact that people were shocked when Eunice chose to be Mohawk and then remain Mohawk

suggests that cases such as hers troubled settler assumptions about the inherent desirability and *value* of white female identity, about the bounds of civilization itself, and about the inherent undesirability of Indian female identity. These gendered and raced forms of difference that scholars have pointed to form part of the savage/civilized redux of settler societies.⁶ This binary maintained the ideological might and justification for claimed lands, contained peoples, and the “social problem” of unassimilatable differences. Juridical efforts to incorporate or expel or contain difference such as the Indian Act were a way of disciplining Indigenous *and* white bodies to a Victorian norm of white settler citizenship or Indian wardship (“Indian status”).

In the gendered provisions of the Indian Act (1876) in Canada—an act that was advanced initially to “protect” Indians from settlers—legal identities and access to resources and rights were defined and regulated by the Canadian state (see Barker, this volume). Contained within the Indian Act were regulations regarding marriage that conferred rights along the patrilineal line. This was an imposition that demeaned and supplanted Iroquois modes of descent, property, and land holding, all of which were conferred along the mother’s line. With the Indian Act, the state recognized the union between an Indian man and a white woman as a *legitimate* one that conferred upon the white woman an Indian legal status. In this way white women were able to become “status” Indians, and in the flip side of this conferral, the law stipulated that Indian women who married nonstatus men lost their Indian status and became Canadian citizens. These women’s citizenship within the nation-state of the settler society thus also carried their disenfranchisement from their Indian communities.

When considering this raced and gendered binary we may then view the Indian Act and other colonial legislative efforts to contain difference as mechanisms to manage and control the ontological crisis in value that would ensue had “mixed marriages” between Indians and whites remained unregulated. Were these fields of desire and sexual sociality to remain unregulated as they were prior to the early Indian Acts, binaries and land might blur and appear in disarray—with Indians as proper title-holders and with their own genealogies and forms of recognition. It may be argued then that the Indian Act represented the state’s efforts to flatten a competing system of gendered subject formation and social organization, including Indigenous genealogies, philosophical systems, and modes of governance. As alchemies of racial and cultural difference, Mohawk captivity and adoption were (almost) undone in the face of emergent state power and domination. The audiences for captivity narratives would see their own fears about shifting binaries of savage/self/civil/

other played out for them in these truth-promising stories; law might then arc to meet that truth.

In order to suggest the power of such narratives to help generate and reinforce legal discourses, we must ask different questions of the data. A feminist analysis that squares itself with questions of indigeneity will ask how Eunice Williams's captivity narrative contributes to the expropriation of land and to the reformulation of Indigenous gender and governmental systems. More precisely, how does the gendered position of Indigenous peoples within this historical narrative help us understand the expropriation of land that underwrites social and political relations today?

These forms of political recognition and misrecognition are forms of "citizenship" that have become social, and thus are citizenships, I wish to argue, of grief.⁷ They share, in this moment, a transhistoric logic and space of recognition and misrecognition that are predicated upon an apparent loss of membership in a natal community that is differently experienced along race and gender lines. White women did not lose their citizenship in the Canadian state—or access to their home territory upon their out-marriage to Indian men—but upon their out-marriages Indian women lost their "status" as Indians. The Canadian state federally enfranchised all Indians in 1960. However, the marriage of Indian women to nonstatus men would alienate them from their reserves, their families, and their rights as Indians until the passage of bill C-31 in 1985. Thus one can argue that these status losses, and citizenship gains, would always be accompanied by some form of grief.

In my previous work I have examined the impact of bill C-31 and contextualized it within the simultaneous experience of coloniality in Canada as well as Mohawk nationhood.⁸ But in this analysis, bill C-31 is a backdrop for and articulation of North American settlement itself. I am drawing the contrasts and parallels between Williams's life in the eighteenth century and the lives of Mohawk women today to put them in sharp relief. My analysis occupies the dissonant space between the two in order to locate the ways in which their bodies and the difference that they convey emerge from within a politics of state recognition. In the longer version of this essay I advance this argument further with an analysis of the John Williams text on his own captivity, *The redeemed captive, returning to Zion: A faithful history of the remarkable*, and a contemporary ethnography of captivity, the end-game to the Eunice Williams story: the Indian Act, "C-31 women," and the act's reverberations in Kahnawake today.⁹ I am interested in the experience and struggle of contemporary Mohawk women who, upon their marriage to white men, were exiled from their communities by the Indian Act in Canada (1876). The story of Mohawk

women in the nineteenth and twentieth (and twenty-first) centuries contrasts sharply with Eunice, since their marriages to outsiders signaled exile from their homes and families and the *loss* of a right of return to their home territory. Thus the most pressing argument in this essay is that the life of Eunice Williams and the ways it has been treated in literature are factors in the logics of political recognition *today*.

Williams's life is important for feminist analysis grounded in Indigenous sensibilities for the historical logic that it starts to pronounce. This is a logic that recognizes difference so that it may then neuter that difference. What it will then neuter, in this case, is indigenous governmentality. In the Iroquois case this was attempted through the Indian Act, through the enfranchisement of white women as status Indians. They are not, by birth, clan bearers and thus cannot transmit to their children a place in the order of things unless their children are adopted. This serves to disassemble the social structure of Iroquois society. Williams was, without a doubt "accepted" as a Mohawk, and lived that acceptance within her adopted clan and family. The circulation of her story, rather, and what it did to those who read it, enunciated the logic of becoming—key ideational work for what would later become possible in Canada, when white women "became" Indian in the eyes of the state through the conferral of status upon them. And in that, Indian women became "white women." Exiled from this speculative history and logical configuration is the Mohawk woman's life that brought hers (as a Mohawk) into being, an exile.

The terrain I have covered on captivity, on Canadian Indian policy, and the space between the two narrative fragments that frame this essay is the importance of the Williams tale as groundwork of a sort, for things that were yet to come. It is of no coincidence in the contemporary frame of settler society that this story, which is of a white woman successfully becoming Indian, would enjoy the kind of attention that it receives. I think its attention articulates and evidences, in an empirically meaningful way, the desires and designs of a settler society to incorporate and settle in out-of-the-way spaces, places, and families. As scholars who articulate our work to the problematics of power and gender, and as concerned citizens of several nations, we might also continue to use events such as the one in 1704 as occasions to think critically about the gendered and racialized historical logics that enable or disable certain forms of recognition through time, through place, and through bodies—corporeal and otherwise.

Notes

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1. The epigraphs are from (1) John Williams, “The redeemed captive, returning to Zion: A faithful history of remarkable occurrences”, in *The captivity and the deliverance of Mr. John Williams; Minister of the Gospel, in Deerfield, who, in the desolation which befel that plantation, by an incursion of the French & Indians, was by them carried away, with his family, and his neighbourhood, unto Canada. Whereto there is annexed a sermon preached by him, upon his return, at the lecture Boston, December. 5. 1706. On those words, Luk. 8. 39. Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee. Boston in N. E. B. Green, for Samuel Phillips at the brick shop, 1707*, 15; and (2) quoted in Audra Simpson, “To the Reserve and Back Again: Kahnawake Narratives of Self, Home, and Nation” (PhD diss., McGill University, 2003), 233.
2. See Evan Haefali and Kevin Sweeney’s *Captors and Captives: The 1704 French Raid on Deerfield* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003). For general context on the Northeastern landscape of war and exchange, please see Linda Colley’s *Captives: The Story of Britain’s Pursuit of Empire and How Its Soldiers and Civilians Were Held Captive by the Dream of Global Supremacy, 1600–1800* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 137–98.
3. Haefali and Sweeney offer the most detailed discussion of Williams’s Mohawk mother in the literature and embed her inconsolability within a smallpox epidemic in 1701. The loss of her daughter rendered her “so much borne down with [her grief] that some of her relations predicted that she would not survive long” (72–73).
4. Pauline Turner-Strong, *Captive Selves: Captivating Others: The Politics and Poetics of Colonial American Captivity Narratives* (Boulder: Westview, 1999), 119.
5. Frances Roe Kestler, ed., *The Indian Captivity Narrative: A Woman’s View* (New York: Garland, 1990), xiii.
6. See Sarah Carter’s *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada’s Prairie West* (Montreal: McGill Queen’s University Press, 1997); Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and Native American Genocide* (Boston: South End Press, 2005); and Sherene Razack’s “The Murder of Pamela George,” in *Race, Space and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society* (Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 2002).
7. See Audra Simpson, “Paths Toward a Mohawk Nation: Narratives of Nationhood and Citizenship in Kahnawake,” in *Political Theory and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, ed. Duncan Ivison, Paul Patton, and Will Sanders, 113–36 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), and “To the Reserve and Back Again: Kahnawake Mohawk Narratives of Self, Home, and Nation” (PhD diss., McGill University, 2003).
8. See Simpson, *Paths Toward a Mohawk Nation*, 2000, and *To the Reserve and Back Again*, 2003.
9. Part of my focus is historic, but part is contemporary, as they experienced this loss in spite of their traditional role in Mohawk society as the carriers of clan, culture, and property.