Cultural Hybridity in Rowlandson's Captivity Narrative

Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, reveals a double-sided story of cultural exchange. Throughout the narrative, both Rowlandson and the natives among whom she lives exhibit cultural hybridity. The most evident point of cultural mixing occurs when the natives and Rowlandson use one another's commodities. The sharing of culture in this dualistic exchange of goods, services, and money is frequently referenced throughout Rowlandson's narrative. While some aspects of Rowlandson's captivity narrative suggest hybridity, there are other points of cultural separation. A majority of the critiques of native culture come from Rowlandson's religious orientation and her post-survival, hindsight assessment.

Rowlandson's expression of cultural hybridity is present in two folds of her narrative. These two folds are the colonists' effect on the natives and then, in reverse, the natives' effect on Rowlandson as a colonist. Rowlandson portrays the influence of colonial culture on the natives when describing the natives' participation in the colonial market. In her nineteenth remove Rowlandson writes, "the Saggamores met to consult about the Captives, and called me to them to enquire how much my husband would give to redeem me… and said they were the General Court" (503). The first aspect of cultural hybridity comes with the natives' curiosity of Rowlandson's monetary value to her people. The colonial economy is at the cross-roads of a mercantilist economy with a blending of trade and monetary exchange (Goodman 2). An inquiry regarding money indicates the natives have adopted the more European exchange system and must be accustomed to trading goods and services for European currency. The concluding portion of the previous quote has the natives referring to themselves as "the General Court" (503). In Lauter's words, the natives are representing themselves to Rowlandson "in imitation of

the Colonial Assembly of Massachusetts" (Lauter 503). The natives' mock assembly represents cultural hybridity in that the natives are taking on facets of colonial-run governments.

Rowlandson's hand-sewn goods are solicited by the natives' thus providing another example of hybridity and adoption of colonial culture. One way Rowlandson survives is by her incorporation into the native economy through the bartering of her knitted caps and stockings (Kolodny 184-185). The natives' desire for European style clothing and knit work suggests cultural hybridity. In her eighth remove Rowlandson writes, "Philip spake to me to make a shirt for his boy, which I did, for which he gave me a shilling: I offered the mony to my master, but he bade me keep it; and with it I bought a piece of Horse flesh" (496). In this passage Rowlandson is referring to Metacom, who was also known as King Phillip by the colonists (Potter 154). In the previous quote cultural hybridity fuels Phillip's desire for a colonial style shirt. A second indication of cultural hybridity refers back to the native adoption of the European currency exchange system in which Phillip participates in by paying Rowlandson with "a shilling" (496).

Not only is cultural influence, from the colonists onto the natives, evident in the natives' use of money and desire for colonial goods, but Rowlandson also points out directly how some natives have adopted European fashions. In her twentieth remove, Rowlandson describes her master and mistress natives prepping for a native ritual dance. In her description she mentions that her master is wearing a linen shirt and "his garters were hung round with Shillings" (505). The linen shirt is an obvious reference to European textiles; therefore, the native master has adopted a fashion typically worn by colonists. Although the native master is using money as a decorative jewel, this is a form of hybridity because the natives are also seen wearing their own valuable stones as jewelry. In placing the shillings alongside their stones, in the outfits of their ritual dance, the natives must consider money to be equivalent to their valued jewels.

Rowlandson continues her description of the adoption of European fashion when describing her native mistress, who wears "her hair powdered and face painted Red" (507). The juxtaposition of the European powdered hair with the native red face painting provides a composite image of hybridity inundating even the most individualistic choices of the natives' bodies with colonial, influence.

Rowlandson's self-reflection also indicates cultural hybridity; however, this hybridity represents the native culture's influence on colonists and on Rowlandson specifically. Rowlandson incorporates native language several times during the narrative. "She uses the Wampanoag term for husband, 'sannup,' as well as 'pow-wow' and 'sagamore,' and the Wampanoag answer to her question, 'would they sell me to my husband': 'Nux' [Yes]" (Logan 269). Rowlandson's use of the native language suggests the cultural mixing of native culture into the lives of colonists. Rowlandson begins to partake in the use of typically native goods and commodities providing an even stronger image of native influence. Rowlandson writes, after hearing from King Phillip his herbal remedy to cure his war wound, "then I took Oaken leaves and laid to my side, and with the blessing of God it cured me also" (491). In this quote Rowlandson adopts the natives' medical treatment and their use of herbs to cure her bullet wound. Later in her narrative Rowlandson describes the adoption of the natives' food. Rowlandson writes,

> The first week of my being among them, I hardly ate any thing; the second week, I found my stomach grow very faint for want of something; and yet it was very hard to get down their filthy trash: but the third week, though I could think how formerly my stomach would turn against this or that, and I could starve and dy before I could eat such things, yet they were sweet and savoury to my taste. (494)

Rowlandson's transformation from complete disproval of the native food to later describing it as "sweet and savoury" is a display of Rowlandson's cultural hybridity influenced by the natives' diet. Rowlandson describes receiving a package from her husband while in captivity.

Rowlandson recounts “amongst other things which my husband sent me there came a pound of Tobacco” (506). Tobacco was introduced to colonists by natives; the mention of it, within the narrative, as a commodity Rowlandson’s colonist husband sends her shows how native crops have been integrated into colonial culture. Although these images of Rowlandson adopting native culture are present in her narrative, Rowlandson’s typological, post-survival framing of the narrative suggests that the adoption of the natives’ sinful behaviors was only upon necessity of the natives’ acceptance and in hopes of reaching eventual salvation (Shuo Cao 1).

Through Rowlandson’s religious terminology and hindsight view, points of cultural differences and separation become evident that oppose the other aspects of the narrative that suggest cultural hybridity. Most of the points made by Rowlandson that are associated with the representation of cultural differences are highlighted by Rowlandson’s staunch religious views. In fact the very title of the narrative, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, suggests Rowlandson credited her survival to God’s good will and authority. From the start of the narrative Rowlandson refers to the natives as “hell hounds” and “ravenous beasts” making a strong distinction between them and the “so many Christians” targeted by their attack on Lancaster (488). Rowlandson ends the narrative on a similar note by placing the natives in contrast with the Christians. Rowlandson writes, “I was not before so much hem’d in with the merciless and cruel Heathen, but now as much with pitiful, tender-hearted and compassionate Christians” (511). It is clear that Rowlandson wants to distinguish the good nature of the Christian colonists from the evils of the native nations; meanwhile, she resolves to portray the natives as cruel and savage. Rowlandson also points out the cultural superiority of the natives to withstand obstacles brought about by the wilderness with much better esteem than the Europeans. Rowlandson describes a scene in which whole native families are able to cross a river

in half the time the English army is able to do so. In making the point that the natives have superior abilities to work alongside nature, Rowlandson is recognizing a distinguishable trait that differs from the colonists' methods of dominating and appropriating nature.

Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative provides a strong representation of the hybridity between the colonists and natives (and vice versa). Rowlandson's recognition of the exchange of goods, services, and money as the root of cultural exchange offers a look into how the two societies shared some aspects of one another's culture. Although Rowlandson's narrative offers up a variety of views on hybridity she is also able to distinguish the differences of culture by pointing out contrasts in religion, compassion, and standards of living. Rowlandson's pious and victim of captivity perspective provides a prejudice outlook suggesting colonial resistance in adopting native culture; however, hybridity in both directions was seemingly inevitable due to the presence of the two cultures in such close proximity.

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