

# HYBRID SUBJECTS AND FLUID IDENTITIES IN WOMEN'S INDIAN CAPTIVITY NARRATIVES: THE STORIES OF FRANCES SLOCUM AND OLIVE OATMAN

ELENA ORTELLS MONTÓN  
*Universidad Jaime I de Castellón*  
*ortel@ang.uji.es*

Received 4 June 2015

Accepted 27 January 2016

## **KEYWORDS**

Captivity narratives; transculturated women; Frances Slocum; Olive Oatman; tattoos.

## **PALABRAS CLAVE**

Relatos de cautiverio; mujeres y aculturación; Frances Slocum; Olive Oatman; tatuajes.

## **ABSTRACT**

During the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, adoptions of white children by Native American tribes and interracial marriages were extremely disturbing issues for Euro-American society. Women such as Eunice Williams, Mary Jemison or Frances Slocum chose not to return to the “civilized” territory they had been forced to abandon. For others such as Olive Oatman and Cynthia Ann Parker, their restoration was extraordinarily traumatic since indigenous culture had left a profound imprint on both their bodies and their minds. The stories of these *transculturated* women complicate the notions of identity and “belonging” and invite us to think about modern conceptualizations of “race.” Hence, it is my intention to show how in spite of the countless efforts of the patriarchal and imperialistic stratum to use the voices of the captive women to circulate a hegemonic cultural model that relied on the superiority of the white race and the male gender, most of their stories challenge cultural expectations about whiteness and masculinity and surreptitiously debunk orthodox conceptions of ethnicity and gender. The accounts of both Frances Slocum and Olive Oatman are presented here as illustrative of those exceptional “voices” who, making use of the socially sanctioned cultural resources of their times, broke through the prevailing structures of power and authority and managed to circulate atypical stories of dauntless female figures. Their narratives unveil much about how white women experienced and revised the binarisms on which Western ideologies of race, class, and gender relied.

## **RESUMEN**

Durante los siglos XVII, XVIII y XIX, las adopciones de niños blancos por tribus nativo-americanas y los matrimonios interraciales resultaban muy inquietantes para la sociedad euro-americana. Mujeres como Eunice Williams, Mary Jemison o Frances Slocum eligieron no regresar al espacio “civilizado” que se habían visto forzadas a abandonar. Para otras, como Olive Oatman y Cynthia Ann Parker, su restitución fue extraordinariamente traumática ya que la cultura indígena había dejado una profunda huella en sus mentes y en sus cuerpos. Las historias de estas mujeres destacan la complejidad de cuestiones ligadas a la identidad y a la pertenencia a un grupo y nos invitan a reflexionar sobre las conceptualizaciones modernas del término “raza.” Así pues, mi intención es mostrar cómo a pesar de los innumerables esfuerzos del estamento imperialista y patriarcal por utilizar las voces y experiencias de las cautivas para vehicular un modelo cultural hegemónico basado en la superioridad de la raza blanca y del género masculino, la mayoría de estos relatos cuestionan, de manera subrepticia, las más ortodoxas creencias culturales relacionadas con la etnia y el género. Las historias de Frances Slocum y Olive Oatman se presentan aquí como ilustrativas de esas voces excepcionales que, valiéndose de las vías socialmente aceptadas, transgredieron las estructuras de poder y de autoridad dominantes y vehicularon relatos atípicos sobre intrépidas figuras femeninas. Sus relatos dan buena cuenta de cómo las mujeres blancas experimentaron y revisaron los binarismos sobre los que descansaban las ideologías occidentales en cuestiones de raza, clase y género.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In his book *Injun Joe's Ghost. The Indian Mixed-Blood in American Writing*, Harry J. Brown refers to “two significant postcolonial issues: hybridity, the condition of mediating two competing racial, cultural, or discursive realities; and authenticity, the potential of the hybrid subject for self-representation as he or she is circumscribed by the dominant discourse” (8). Although captivity narratives have functioned as authoritative accounts that emphasize “the undesirability of race mixing and place the events of colonization, settlement, and conquest into narratives of violent conflict” (Buss 2), the stories of white *transculturated* women—those that, assimilated to indigenous ways of life, resisted to be redeemed and returned to civilization—seem to act as a contradiction to this idea. In fact, far from using the term “freedom” to define their return to white society most of these women “expand the parameters of their texts to show their continuing imprisonment, even after their return from captivity, within the subordinating, infantilizing, and immobilizing gender ideologies of white America” (Castiglia 11). Moreover, not being able to identify with the patriarchal aspects of their culture these captives use the liminal state which they inhabit “to create interstitial narratives that re-contextualize, denaturalize, and reconstruct the identity-formations of their home cultures” (ibid.). Accordingly, it is my intention to show how in spite of the countless efforts of the patriarchal and imperialistic stratum to use the voices of the captive women to circulate a hegemonic cultural model that relied on the superiority of the white race

and the male gender, most of their stories challenge cultural expectations about whiteness and masculinity and surreptitiously debunk orthodox conceptions of ethnicity and gender. Thus, Brown's notions of hybridity and authenticity become extraordinarily productive when applied to the narratives of Frances Slocum, "the lost sister of Wyoming," and Olive Oatman, "America's first bona fide 'tattooed lady'" (McGinty 179). These accounts will serve to endorse life among the Native-Americans as a desirable alternative to the male-controlled societies of their times and will act as a corrective on predetermined assumptions about "savagery" and "civilization."

Women such as Eunice Williams, Mary Jemison or Frances Slocum chose not to return to the original territory they had been forced to abandon. In 1704, Eunice Williams, daughter of the Reverend John Williams, was captured in an Indian raid against the settlement of Deersfield, Massachusetts. Seven-year-old Eunice was abducted and rapidly assimilated the customs of her captors. She converted to Catholicism and in spite of her father's persistent efforts to return her to the Puritan society of her origins she chose to remain with her Mohawk family: "Every effort was made to persuade her to leave the Indians and remain among her relations, but in vain. She preferred the Indian mode of life and the haunts of the Indians, to the unutterable grief of her father and friends" (Williams 175). On a spring day in the year 1758, Mary Jemison together with her family and some neighbors were captured by a party of six Indians and four Frenchmen who had launched an attack against the frontier settlement they inhabited in the region known as Marsh Creek. Soon after, the war party tomahawked them all except the fifteen-year-old Mary and a little boy. Young Mary was then given to two Seneca sisters to replace a lost brother and in what she later learned was a ceremony of adoption was given the name Dickewamis (Ortells, Narrative 74). Similarly, on November 2, 1778, five-year old Frances Slocum was taken captive by a party of Delaware, adopted by them and, to all intents and purposes, became a Native American. Fifty-seven years after the abduction took place, the woman happened to be found by George W. Ewing, an Indian agent working for the government of the United States, who informed her white family of her existence. A party consisting of two brothers, a sister, and an interpreter was formed in order to make her return to "civilization." However and in spite of all their exertions she refused to yield since all her family roots were then in Indian territory. Both Mary Jemison, "the white woman of the Genesee," and Frances Slocum, "the lost sister of Wyoming," epitomized the integral conversion to Native American culture. Full members of their respective communities –Shawnee and Delaware/Miami–, Dehgewanus and We-let-a-was/Maconaquah married the chief of their tribes, bore them children, became prominent figures in their tribes and never returned to the white society in which they had been born. As Mary Jemison acknowledged after four years of captivity, "with them was my home; my family was there, and there I had many friends to

whom I was warmly attached in consideration of the favors, affection and friendship with which they had uniformly treated me, from the time of my adoption.” (qtd. Derounian-Stodola, *Women* 148-9)

For others such as Olive Oatman and Cynthia Ann Parker, their return to civilization was extraordinarily traumatic since indigenous culture had left a profound imprint on both their bodies and their minds. Unlike Williams, Jemison or Slocum, Parker and Oatman were redeemed against their will and returned to civilization. In 1836, nine-year-old Parker was captured by Native Americans, and after totally integrating into the native society that had adopted her, ended up marrying one of the most important warriors of her tribe - Pata Nocona - and creating a new family: “Cynthia Ann [...] bore him children, and we are assured *loved* him with a species of fierce passion and wifely devotion” (DeShields 31). In fact, when a party of white hunters asked her to return to civilization, “[s]he shook her head in a sorrowful negative, and pointed to her little, naked barbarians sporting at her feet, and to the great greasy, lazy buck sleeping in the shade near at hand” and underlined her Comanche identity and family ties: “I’m happily wedded [...] I love my husband, who is good and kind, and my little ones, who, too, are his, and I cannot forsake them!” (DeShields 32). However, in 1860, Cynthia Ann/Naduah and her daughter Topsyannah were forced to return to Parker’s white family although “she sought every opportunity to escape, and had to be closely watched for some time” (71). When, in 1864, her Indian daughter died, Parker starved herself to death. Olive Oatman experienced similar difficulties in her readjustment to her culture of origin. On February 18, 1851, while on their way to the confluence of the Gila and Colorado rivers, the Oatman family was attacked by a band of Native Americans (probably Western Yavapais, or Tolkepayas although, for a long time, they were thought to be Tonto Apache Indians). All the members of the family, except Lorenzo and the two sisters, were killed. Whereas the brother managed to return to Maricopa Wells, Mary Ann and Olive were made captives – for many whites, “a fate worse than death” (Derounian-Stodola and Levernier 2). The Oatman girls lived for about a year with their first captors and then they were traded to the Mohaves with whom, contrarily to widely held ideas at the time, they appeared to have led an agreeable existence. Actually, in an interview which appeared in the *Los Angeles Star* on April 19, 1856, to a direct question regarding the Mohave’s treatment of her and her sister, Olive responded that they treated them “[v]ery well.’ (From her manner seemed perfectly pleased). They had never whipped her but always treated her well” (Kroeber 312). After five years of living with Yavapai and Mohave Native Americans, she was restored to civilization with an indelible proof of her adventure: her face had been tattooed as a symbol of her acquiescence with indigenous mores.

Starting with *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God: Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, the first Indian captivity

narrative published in North America in 1682,<sup>1</sup> the stories of white women victimized by ruthless Indian warriors were used to justify the extermination of Native populations and to confine women to the domestic realm (Burnham; Derounian-Stodola; Castiglia; Ebersole; Ortells, Namias; Pearce; Strong). Through the appropriation of these women's voices and experiences, the patriarchal and imperialistic stratum disseminated a historical project based on a cultural model that relied on the superiority of the white race and the male gender. However, from the very beginning also many of these women managed to exercise agency and to destabilize conventional expectations regarding ethnicity and gender by circulating transgressive narratives. Alden T. Vaughan and Edward W. Clark speak of four categories of captivity narratives: first, those in which the authors betray limited or no alteration in their cultural identity as a result of their experience (14); second, those in which the authors "gained empathetic insight into Indian culture;" third, those written by former captives "who had difficulty adjusting to their natal culture after long exposure to Indian life" (15); and fourth, a "hypothetical" category that "could have been written by those who never returned to their natal culture" (16). Most of the women above mentioned fit the last two categories and, far from telling their own stories, their experiences were mediated in different degrees by male editors mainly. Thus, the question we may pose is do these narratives enact the discourse of the *oppressed* hybrid subject or do they endorse the dominant versions of American history? Following Homi Bhabha's argumentation, it is my contention that although the dominant discourse and its enablers inevitably manage to translate the discourse of the "subaltern" –using the expression coined by Gayatri Spivak–<sup>2</sup> into its own terms, "the subaltern is indeed always speaking, if not directly, at least obliquely in the ways it fractures the dominant discourse that can never fully contain it" (Brown 9). Both Frances Slocum and Olive Oatman are presented here as illustrative of those exceptional "voices" who, making use of the socially sanctioned cultural resources of their times, broke through the prevailing structures of power and authority and circulated atypical stories of dauntless female figures. Their accounts unveil much about how white women experienced and revised the binarisms – of white and Indian, civilized and uncivilized, man and woman – on which Western ideologies of race, class, and gender relied.

## 2. FRANCES SLOCUM, "THE LOST SISTER OF WYOMING"

---

<sup>1</sup> The influence of Mary Rowlandson's foundational text on the development of the genre has been extensively dealt with elsewhere: i. e. Burnham 1993, 1997; Castiglia 1996; Derounian-Stodola 1987, 1988, 1994; Ebersole 1995; Ortells 2008, 2012; Salisbury 1997, 2002; Strong 1999.

<sup>2</sup> More specifically, Gayatri Spivak speaks of "the historically muted subject of the subaltern woman" (91).

Adoptions of white children by Indian tribes and interracial marriages were extremely disturbing issues for Euro-American society since they cast doubts on claims of white superiority and male control over women's sexual behavior (Kolodny 70, Wickstrom 176). We cannot forget that "white women were economic, social, and sexual possessions of white men; therefore, a nonwhite man who 'possessed' a white woman undermined the gendered and racialized dominance of white men" (Buss 19). The fact that people were stunned when Williams, Jemison or Slocum chose to remain with their *captors* and when Parker and Oatman showed reluctance to be redeemed and to return to civilization suggests that cases such as theirs troubled colonist assumptions about the indisputable status of white female individuality, about the limits of civilization itself, and about the natural undesirability of Indian female identity (Simpson 254). Even though "intermarriage was subsequently masked by 'pioneer' memories of a 'white' frontier, obscuring both the frequency and importance of [it]" (Buss 19), it is evident that marrying Delaware and Miami Chiefs and bearing them children were decisive factors in Frances Slocum's assimilation and transformation into Maconaquah/Young Bear. In fact, we are told that "[t]he lost Sister still lives in her own wild home on the Missisinyway River, with her children and grand-children. No inducement can tempt her to think of leaving it, even on a visit to the abodes of the civilized race" (Todd 155). Hence Young Bear's reluctance to return to "civilization" destabilized the common assumption at the time of the genetic subservience of native peoples and highlighted the dangers of miscegenation for "the success of the white project to control America" (Faery 195-6).

Although Slocum's abduction and captivity was retold many times during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>3</sup> I would like to focus on Reverend John Todd's *The Lost Sister of Wyoming: An Authentic Narrative* (1842), and on Martha Bennett Phelps's *Frances Slocum: the Lost Sister of Wyoming* (1906), an account by one of Slocum's nieces. Todd's version becomes relevant for our study since it was the first one to present this woman's narrative. It faithfully relied on source materials and interviews which had been provided by the Slocum family and which were never returned to them. This explains why subsequent stories contained no new information and were merely a repetition of the Reverend's report

---

<sup>3</sup> i.e.: Charles Miner, *History of Wyoming: In a Series of Letters* (Philadelphia: J. Crissy, 1845); Benson J. Lossing, *Pictorial Field Book of the Revolution* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1850), I: 367-370; George Peck, *Wyoming: Its History, Stirring Incidents, and Romantic Adventures* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1858); John F. Meginness, *Biography of Frances Slocum, the Lost Sister of Wyoming* (Williamsport, PA: Heller Brothers' Printing House, 1891); Phelps, *Frances Slocum*; Otho Winger, *The Last of the Miamis* (North Manchester, IN: Author, 1935), 21-23; George Cottman, "Sketch of Frances Slocum," *The Indiana Quarterly Magazine of History* 1 (Third Quarter, 1905): 119-122; Joseph Allen Minturn, *Francis Slocum of Miami Lodge: The Dramatic Story of the White Girl that Became an Indian Princess and Her Relation to the Stirring Events through Which the Northwest Territory Was Wrested Away from the British and Indians* (Indianapolis: Globe P, 1928).

adding little to the first account (Buss 11). Phelps's narrative was also deemed significant for this analysis since it evinced the preeminence of Victorian values such as domesticity and female dependence among settlers (Strobel 376). My choice of texts exemplifies how the gender of the editor only relatively circumscribed the representation of the "oppressed hybrid subject," and how the voice of the "subaltern," Maconaquah/Young Bear, managed "to fracture the dominant discourse" in both cases. Whereas Todd "seemed more anxious to impress moral maxims on the minds of the young than to write a graphic or thrilling account of 'The Lost Sister'" (Phelps vi), the niece's version was originally intended "to give the tender personal traditions, on which as children we were nourished, so that our children and grandchildren may hear the story as told by their ancestors" (vii). However, by literally reproducing most of the Reverend's account, Phelps's story seems to illustrate the extended belief according to which women contributed enormously to the shaping of gendered attitudes and expectations. Thus, in spite of their apparently divergent initial aims, both editors coincide in reducing to the minimum the voice of the "subaltern." In fact, hardly one chapter is devoted in each text to the presentation of the first-hand experience of the "captive." "The Lost Sister" is allowed "to relate, through the interpreter, as much of her history as she could remember" (Todd 131; Phelps 95) and according to the number of pages in which she speaks – interestingly enough around eleven out of one hundred and sixty pages in Todd's and six pages out of one hundred and seventy-one pages in Phelps'—her recollections do not amount to much.



Picture of Maconaquah (Peck 267)

Nevertheless, in those few pages reserved for the “silenced voice,” “the old, jealous, ignorant, suspicious savage” (Todd 126) manages to challenge a hegemonic cultural model that was grounded on the superiority of the white race and the male gender. Although most of the chapters of both narratives attest to the rigid binary hierarchies –man/woman, public space/private realm, white/Indian, civilized/uncivilized – that structured the ideological discourse of the society of their time, soon we commence to suspect a dissonant voice struggling to escape control and that clearly departs from the conventional discourse. Frances Slocum hid her identity as a white person during the fifty-nine years in which she lived with Delaware and Miami Native Americans of whom she spoke of as “my people.” When her brothers found out about her existence, they pleaded for her return to “civilization” and she refused using an argumentation that clearly evinced her profound assimilation of Native American religious beliefs:

I cannot. I cannot. I am an old tree. It cannot move about. I was a sapling when they took me away. It is all gone past. I am afraid I should die and never come back. I am happy here. I shall die here and lie in that grave-yard, and they will raise the pole at my grave with the white flag on it, and the Great Spirit will know where to find me. I should not be happy with my white relatives. I am glad enough to see them, but I cannot go. I cannot go. (Todd 143; Phelps 64)

As a narrative written “for the benefit of the young” (3), Todd’s chronicle silences some of the manifestations that unashamedly unveil Slocum’s manifest sympathy for the Native Americans: “The Indians were very kind to me; when they had anything to eat, I always had the best, and when I was tired, they carried me in their arms” (Phelps 97). Although these words were excluded from the minister’s version of the story, Slocum’s blatant preferences for life among the savages permeate both narratives. It is interesting to see how Todd’s device to exonerate the whites becomes Young Bear’s best instrument to circulate controversial views on traditional conceptions regarding race and gender thus contributing to the fracture of the prevalent ideology. In fact, when asked to return to her white relatives, she responds in the following terms:

I have always lived with the Indians. They have always used me very kindly. I am used to them. The Great Spirit has always allowed me to live with them, and I wish to live and die with them. Your Wah-puh-mone (looking-glass) may be larger than mine, but this is my home. I do not wish to live any better, or anywhere else, and I think the Great Spirit has permitted me to live so long, because I have always lived with the Indians. I should have died sooner if I had left them. My husband and my boys are buried here, and I cannot leave them. On his dying day my husband charged me not to leave the Indians. I have a house, and large lands, two daughters, a son-in-law, three grandchildren, and everything to make me comfortable. Why should I go, and be like a fish out of the water? (Todd 140-1).



Hence, Maconaquah/Young Bear's description of her idyllic life with the Native Americans posits an unorthodox interpretation of historical events and disrupts the pervasive power of the dominant beliefs. The "poor, darkened savage" (129) Todd wrote about in his "authentic account" becomes the "historical informant" (Carroll 7) who disrupts the racial boundaries so vigorously imposed by the prevailing discourse and who substantiates the notion of hybridity "not as a condition of exclusion and vacillation but of synthesis and simultaneity." (Brown 11).

### 3. OLIVE OATMAN, "THE TATTOOED LADY"

Royal B. Stratton's *Life among the Indians: Being an Interesting Narrative of the Captivity of the Oatman Girls* (1857)<sup>4</sup> had its origins in the story of the sisters Olive and Mary Ann Oatman. Similarly to what the Puritans were doing two centuries earlier, Reverend Stratton, a Methodist minister and editor of the text, always presented Olive Oatman's liberation as an epic crusade against Indian barbarity. In accordance with the ideological foundations of the period, the priest also employed arguments of Manifest Destiny to proclaim Christian superiority and circulate a nationalistic discourse: "The march of American civilization, if unhampered by the weakness and corruption of its own happy subjects will yet, and soon, break upon the barbarity of these numerous tribes and, either elevate them to the unappreciated blessings of a superior state, or wipe them into oblivion, and give their long undeveloped territory to another" (284-5).

The minister's narrative becomes then another example of what Derounian-Stodola categorized as "multivocal, heteroglossic, or palimpsestic [texts]" (Captivity 107), stories in which a male editor appropriated the voice of a female captive and even impersonated his subject and which resulted in a coalescence of voices difficult to disentangle. Thus, in his Preface to the first edition of *Life among the Indians*, Stratton explicitly stated that he wrote the story at the request of "the afflicted brother and son [...]; especially to give a full and particular account of *the dreadful and barbarous scenes of the captivity endured by his sisters*" (my italics) (6). Moreover, in his Preface to the Third Edition, the Reverend introduced a blunt and pungent indictment against the Native Americans and emphasized the manifest dichotomy between them and the white *civilization*: "These dark Indian tribes are fast wasting before the rising sun of our civilization; and into *that history* that is yet *to be written* of their past, and of their destiny, and of the many interlacing events that are to contribute to the fulfillment of the wise intent of Providence concerning them and their only dreaded foe, the white race" (16).

---

<sup>4</sup> Published in 1858, the second and third editions were titled *Captivity of the Oatman Girls*.

Nevertheless, in spite of Stratton's initial claims regarding the reliability of his sources and underlying the veracity of the events – (e. g. “The facts and incidents have been received from the brother and sister [...] from those whose sad experiences in adversity these pages give a faithful delineation” (1858: 6) –, Olive's defense of her Mohave captors permeates the text. Hence, when her sister Mary Ann is about to die, she explains how she is accompanied in her grief by the wife of the chief Aespaneo. The presentation of this episode becomes then an enthralling vindication of the compassionate nature of the members of the tribe:

One day, during her singing, quite a crowd gathered about her and seemed much surprised. Some of them would stand for whole hours and gaze upon her countenance as if enchained by a strange sight, and this while some of their own kindred were dying in other parts of the village. Among these was the wife of the chief, Aespaneo. I ought here to say that neither that woman nor her daughter ever gave us any unkind treatment. She came up one day, hearing Mary sing, and bent for some time silently over her. She looked in her face, felt of her, and suddenly broke out in a most piteous lamentation. She wept, and wept from the heart and aloud. I never saw a parent seem to feel more keenly over a dying child. She sobbed, she moaned, she howled. And thus bending over and weeping she stood the whole night. (194)

Although in some instances Olive's discourse seemed to mimic Stratton's anti-Indian bias, she was also very careful to introduce anecdotes which distilled a sympathetic portrait of her life among the inhabitants of the Mohave Valley. Oatman seemed to have undergone a common process among captive women which consisted in moving from original claims of brutality to overt acknowledgment of Indian gentleness, tolerance and respect:

Had it not been for her [the Indian chief's wife], I must have perished. From this circumstance I learned to chide my hasty judgment against ALL the Indian race, and also, that kindness is not always a stranger to the untutored and untamed bosom. I saw in this that their savageness is as much a fruit of their ignorance as of any want of a susceptibility to feel the throbbings of true humanity, if they could be properly appealed to. (200)

This stance was conspicuously bolstered with Olive's attitude during a lecture tour which started in the spring of 1858 with the intention of promoting the sales of the *Captivity of the Oatman Girls*. Oatman was one of the first women to challenge women's exclusion of public speaking and to make use of a realm which at the time was traditionally reserved for abolitionists and reformers. Her personal history and physical appearance appealed an enthusiastic audience intent on learning about intercultural practices. When adopted by the Mohave, Olive and Mary Ann had been both marked with blue tattoos on their arms and chins. Jennifer Putzi's conceptions

on the marked body developed in her book *Identifying Marks: Race, Gender and the Marked Body in Nineteenth-Century America* have been extremely useful to articulate our argumentation on how Oatman's use of her tattoos as an embodiment of the Mohave's cultural system of values and beliefs finally served her to counterattack Stratton's theories and endorse a complex array of ideas that bolstered her agency, enhanced her power and determined her identity. As Victoria Pitts states: "modifying the body promotes symbolic rebellion, resistance, and self-transformation— [...] marking and transforming the body can symbolically 'reclaim' the body from its victimization and objectification in patriarchal culture" (49).

Since the beginning of their ordeal, both sisters plainly understood that their Mohave tattoos and their backgrounds as Indian captives would make it difficult for them to return to "civilization." However, the conception of the tattooed body as a site of horror evolved into an instrument of empowerment once Olive devoted herself to tour the country since "[t]attoo is about revealing, being revealed and gazing upon the revealing. The tattooed subject focuses the public gaze on his or her own body or part of the body while also delighting himself or herself as both exhibitionist and voyeur of his or her own spectacle [...] to wear a tattoo is to see and be seen by controlling the gaze" (Blanchard 295). While in her lectures she referred to her tattoos as "slave marks," she at the same time exploited them to endorse a more transgressive interpretation. Following Putzi's argumentation, Oatman embraced the mark and used it "as the impetus for an oppositional gaze that allows [her] to renegotiate the terms of female agency" (78). The tattoos become a disruptively productive force since "these marks raise the possibility that identity boundaries are ultimately permeable and unreliable" (31) and contribute to present Oatman as "a white woman of color, a foreigner in her own country, a beautiful freak whose blue tattoo denotes the shaky fault lines between civilization and savagery." (Mifflin 208-9).



"Olive Oatman, 1857", unattributed - Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

Tattooing was an important rite of passage among adolescent members of South-Western Native American communities and, consequently, the blue lines on Olive's chin might have proven her adaptation to indigenous practices and integration in Mohave tribal life.<sup>5</sup> In fact, Susan Thompson Lewis Parrish, a friend of Oatman's whose family traveled with the Brewsterite wagon train, asserted that "Olive became the wife of the chief's son and at the time of her rescue was the mother of two little boys" (quoted in Derounian-Stodola, *Captive* 177) and she also maintained that after her return to "civilization" Oatman was a "frightened, tattooed [*sic*] creature who was more savage than civilized, and who sought at every opportunity to flee back to her Indian husband and children" (*ibid.*). Not only that, Parrish always highlighted the woman's endeavors to realign with her original culture and the imprint her life with the Native populations had left both on her physique and on her psyche: "For four years, she lived here with us, but she was a grieving, unsatisfied woman who somehow shook one's belief in civilization. In time we erased the tattoo marks from her face but we could not erase the wild life from her heart" (*ibid.*). Olive became then another example of how captive white women denied "the binary opposition of white and Indian societies; moving between cultures, at home in neither yet ultimately constituted from elements of both, the captives articulate 'hybrid' subjectivities that destabilize white culture's fiction of fixed and pure identity" (Castiglia 7). Oatman's tattoos thus granted contemporary audiences visual proof of such hybridity and this may have triggered reasonable doubts on the sanctioned version of her captivity:

Oatman's performances ultimately call racial and gendered identity into question. Her simultaneous flaunting of her tattoos *and* her femininity pushes her audience to consider the possibility that identity is indeed fluid and that she might be, in fact, transculturated or at the very least not exactly the same girl she had been when she was taken captive. In this sense, Oatman could be seen simultaneously as "one of us" and "one of them." She was a white person whose tattoos and words demonstrated the danger and savagery of the frontier and the necessity of taming it. Yet she was also an "other," a white woman who looked native, who had lived in a native culture, and was rumored to have been adopted or even married into a native tribe. (Putzi 46)

Tattoos underlined Olive's connection with her past and influenced her personal relationships. Her body became hence a liminal space, a site of convergence of two cultures. The indelible marks on her face and arms represent then a site of dialogue which allows the transculturated woman a certain degree of agency. Accordingly, Olive's lack of agency in the initial acquisition of the marks translates into her maneuvering of the evidences of her captivity and her

---

<sup>5</sup> According to Mohave legend, a man or a woman without facial tattoos "would be refused entrance to the 'land of the dead' and had 'to go down a rat-hole' instead." (Taylor and Wallace 4-5)

transforming the tattoos into signs of rebellion, an inspiring vision that could enable women to vindicate their own bodies and the circumstances they had experienced. If, as Putzi affirms “the tattoo is an attempt to freeze identity, and the forcible tattoo an attempt to impose one culture on the body of someone who does not ‘naturally’ belong to that culture” (48), in choosing to exhibit the marks of her captivity, she chooses to tell a new story to herself and others and imply that her account is “in flux, opened to the possibilities of reinscription and renaming” (Pitts 73). Olive Oatman becomes thus another example of how the “subaltern” manages to distort and outwit the prevailing discourse of the patriarchal ideology of her time.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The stories of these *transculturated* women complicate the notions of identity and “belonging” and invite us to think about modern conceptualizations of race forsaking the biological determinism that granted the basis for myths of ethnic division (Brown 65). As historical and ethnographic documents attest, white integration into Indian tribes was not hard to achieve since “Indians did not typically reject persons because of the color of their skin but focused rather on the learnable and acquirable ethnic designators such as ‘language, culturally appropriate behavior, social affiliation, and loyalty’” (Dyar 823). Therefore, the lives of Frances Slocum and Olive Oatman exemplify the need of abandoning color as a labeling and discriminating badge and their narratives prove that identity is created both collectively and individually (Ebersole 274). Defining themselves as Miami and Mohave respectively, these two women anticipate “the twentieth-century departure from racial positivism and the advent of modernist meditations on cultural hybridity” (Brown 73). Biology and culture are then discarded as signifiers of ethnic identity and individual determination takes over: they define themselves as “Indians” according to their own terms “reflecting the contemporary sense of Native self-determination and the refusal of substitute identities [...] mandated by the dominant culture” (ibid. 221). As Ebersole states, “white Indians may serve today as one symbol of the stunning human potential to imagine and to assume a new identity” (274).

The accounts of Frances Slocum and Olive Oatman constitute then significant stances of those outstanding female voices who valiantly managed to fracture the dominant discourse of white power and male authority and revise the dichotomies on which Western beliefs concerning race, class, and gender depended upon at their time. Nowadays, in a globalized context in which the captivity narrative is no longer considered a typically American genre<sup>6</sup> and in which

---

<sup>6</sup> “By the time Mary Rowlandson wrote what most would consider the foundational Indian captivity narrative in North America, the Barbary captivity narrative had already been well established in Europe. Cervantes, himself a captive in Algiers for five years in 1575, had dramatized it in *Don Quixote*, ‘Life in

expressions such as transnational identities or cultural diasporas are current grounds, Gordon Sayre reflects upon the potential of literary studies to analyze real situations and the possibility of adapting the critical studies of captivity narratives to the U.S wars of the 21st century (356).

Although the stories of Slocum and Oatman may seem something which happened a long time ago, daily life tells us that the captivity of a woman and the manipulation of her experience is a never-ending phenomenon and the stories of Jessica Lynch and Shoshana Johnson are a clear example of this. Jessica Lynch served in Iraq during the 2003 invasion. On March 23, she was injured and captured by Iraqi forces but was recovered on April 1 by U. S. Special Operation Forces, or so the story went, because in fact, later on, she accused the U. S. government of embellishing the story as part of the Pentagon's propaganda effort. The title of this book was *I'm a Soldier, Too. The Jessica Lynch Story* and the book was written by the journalist Rick Bragg. Shoshana Johnson was captured in the same operation as Jessica Lynch but her treatment was quite different. Far from being considered a national heroine, Johnson received scarce media attention and only seven years later, in 2010 was she able to publish her story, *I'm Still Standing. From Captive U. S. Soldier to Free Citizen. My Journey Home*. This narrative is the story of a woman soldier, of a mother (a single mother), and a survivor, "an authentic American hero." It is interesting to see how in this case the editor, the voice which "appropriated" her story and told her in the first person was the voice of M.L. Doyle, an African-American woman, a traditionally silenced figure who, in this case, subverted the traditional power structure and transformed the object of the discourse in subject of it.

---

Algiers,' and 'Dungeons of Algiers.'" St. Vincent de Paul had been carried into Tunis in 1605 and sold to an alchemist. Narratives in English by John Fox (1577), Richard Hasleton (1595), Nicholas Roberts (1621), John Rawlins (1621), and Francis Knight (1631) appeared in collections of travel narratives that included encounters with Native Americans. Also in 1631, two Algerian ships landed at the village of Baltimore in Ireland and abducted the entire hamlet. (The Irish poet Thomas Davis immortalized the event in "The Sack of Baltimore 1631" (1844): "The yell of Allah breaks above the prayer and shriek and roar / Oh! Blessed God, the Algerine is Lord of Baltimore.") And in 1675, two years before Rowlandson returned from her removal with Metacom's followers, William Okeley wrote an elaborate captivity narrative, what he called an *Eben-Ezer or a Small Monument of Great Mercy Appearing in the Miraculous Deliverance of John Anthony, William Okley, William Adams, John Jeph's and John Carpenter*, that stylistically resembles Rowlandson's account. The narrative, which includes a harrowing escape in a handmade collapsible canvas boat, would be stripped of all of its biblical references and republished strictly as an adventure story 120 years later, mirroring the sensationalist evolution of many later Indian captivity narratives. A plaque still hangs in Trinity Church in Algiers, commemorating Okeley's harrowing escape. Even before Quaker Elizabeth Hanson's 1728 Indian captivity account, we have the remarkable 1680 tale of Thomas Lurting, The Fighting Sailor turn'd Peaceable Christian, in which Lurting, a converted Quaker, refuses to kill his captors when he regains control of his vessel and instead returns them to the shores of their native land. In short, the Barbary captivity narrative flourished in Europe at the same moment that the west began to colonize the Americas" (Baepler 228).

The persistence of these chronicles nowadays evinces that the gender of the captivity narrative far from being obsolete is part of the mythological realm of the American nation. The captive woman, the appropriation of her voice in the writing of her own experience, the threatening image of the indigenous, of the “other,” are still part and parcel of those national legends in which Americans still project their deepest fears and fantasies. The stories of Jessica Lynch and Shoshana Johnson are examples of how women are still instruments in the hands of men and how their narratives are still used by the patriarchal system for propaganda practices. These examples show how race and gender are issues which nowadays still need to be dealt with. Following Gayatri Spivak’s yearnings, “May our task as female intellectuals contribute to let the subaltern speak.”

## WORKS CITED

- BAEPLER, Paul. “The Barbary Captivity Narrative in American Culture.” *Early American Literature* 39.2 (2004): 217-246.
- BLANCHARD, Marc. “Post-Bourgeois Tattoo: Reflections on Skin-Writing in Late-Capitalistic Societies.” *Visualizing Theory: Selected Essays from V. A. R. 1990-1994*. New York: Routledge, 1995. 287-300.
- BROWN, Harry J. *Injun Joe’s Ghost. The Indian Mixed-Blood in American Writing*. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 2004.
- BURNHAM, Michelle. “The Journey Between: Liminality and Dialogism in Mary White Rowlandson’s Captivity Narrative.” *Early American Literature* 28 (1993): 60-75
- . *Captivity and Sentiment: Cultural Exchange in American Literature, 1682-1861*. Hanover, N. H.: University Press of New England, 1997.
- BUSS, Jim J. “They Found and Left her an Indian: Gender, Race and the Whitening of Young Bear.” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 29 (2008): 1-35.
- CARROLL, Lorraine. *Rhetorical Drag. Gender Impersonation, Captivity and the Writing of History*. Kent: The Kent State UP, 2007.
- CASTIGLIA, Christopher. *Bound and Determined: Captivity, Culture-Crossing, and White Womanhood from Mary Rowlandson to Patty Hearst*. Chicago: U of Chicago P., 1996.
- DEROUNIAN-STODOLA, Kathryn Zabelle and J. Levernier. *The Indian Captivity Narrative, 1550-1900*. New York: Twayne, 1993.

- DEROUNIAN-STODOLA, Kathryn Zabelle. "Puritan Orthodoxy and the 'Survivor Syndrome' in Mary Rowlandson's Indian Captivity Narrative." *Early American Literature* 22 (1987): 82-93.
- . "The Publication, Promotion, and Distribution of Mary Rowlandson's Indian Captivity Narrative in the Seventeenth Century." *Early American Literature* 23 (1988): 239-261.
- . "The Indian Captivity Narratives of Mary Rowlandson and Olive Oatman: Case Studies in the Continuity, Evolution, and Exploitation of Literary Discourse." *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 27.1 (1994): 33-46.
- , ed. *Women's Indian Captivity Narratives*. London: Penguin, 1998.
- . "The Captive and Her Editor: The CIPHERING of Olive Oatman and Royal B. Stratton." *Prospects* 23 (1998): 171-192.
- . "Captivity and the Literary Imagination." In *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writing*. Ed. Baver, Dale M. and Philip Gould. Cambridge: CUP, 2001. 105-121.
- DESHIELDS, James T. *Cynthia Ann Parker: The Story of Her Capture*. St. Louis: Woodward, 1886.
- DYAR, Jennifer. "Fatal Attraction: The White Obsession with Indianness." *The Historian* 65, 4 (2003): 817-836.
- EBERSOLE, Gary L. *Captured by Texts. Puritan to Post-Modern Images of Indian Captivity*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1995.
- FAIRY, Rebecca B. *Cartographies of Desire: Captivity, Race and Sex in the Shaping of an American Nation*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999.
- JOHNSON, Soshana and M. L. Doyle. *I'm Still Standing. From Captive U. S. Soldier to Free Citizen. My Journey Home*. New York: Touchstone, 2010.
- KOLODNY, Annette. *The Land before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P., 1984.
- KROEBER, A. L. and Clifton B. Kroeber. "Olive Oatman's First Account of Her Captivity among the Mohaves." *California Historical Society Quarterly* 41 (1962): 309-17.
- MCGUINTY, Brian. *The Oatman Massacre. A Tale of Desert Captivity and Survival*. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 2005.



- MIFFLIN, Margot. *The Blue Tattoo. The Life of Olive Oatman*. Nebraska: The U of Nebraska P, 2009.
- NAMIAS, June. *White Captives: Gender and Authority on the American Frontier*. North Carolina: U of North Carolina P, 1993.
- ORTELLS, Elena. *La verdadera historia del cautiverio y la restitución de la señora Mary Rowlandson*. Traducción y estudio crítico. València: PUV, 2008.
- . "A Narrative of the Life of Mrs Mary Jemison: Rhetorical Drag and the Defiance of Hegemonic Cultural Models." *ATLANTIS. Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies*. 32.1 (2010): 73–86.
- . *Prisioneras de salvajes. Relatos y confesiones de mujeres cautivas de indios norteamericanos*. València: PUV, 2012.
- PEARCE, Roy H. "The Significance of the Captivity Narrative." *American Literature* 29 (1947): 1-20.
- PECK, George. *Wyoming: Its History, Stirring Incidents, and Romantic Adventures*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1858.
- PHELPS, Martha B. *Frances Slocum: the Lost Sister of Wyoming*. New York: Vail-Ballou, 1906.
- PITTS, Victoria. *In the Flesh: The Cultural Politics of Body Modification*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- PUTZI, Jennifer. *Identifying Marks: Race, Gender and the Marked Body in Nineteenth-Century America*. Georgia: U of Georgia P, 2006.
- SALISBURY, Neal, ed. *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God by Mary Rowlandson with Related Documents*. Boston: Bedford-St. Martin, 1997.
- . "Contextualizing Mary Rowlandson: Native Americans, Lancaster and the Politics of Captivity." *Early America Re-Explored. New Readings in Colonial, Early National, and Antebellum Culture*. Ed. K. H. Schmidh and F. Fleischmann. New York: Peter Lang, 2002. 107-150.
- SAYRE, Gordon. "Renegades from Barbary: The Transnational Turn in Captivity Studies." *American Literary History* 22. 2 (2010): 347–359.
- SIMPSON, Audra. "From White into Red: Captivity Narratives as Alchemies of Race and Citizenship." *American Quarterly* 60. 2 (2008): 251-257.

- SPIVAK, Gayatri. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Ed. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg. Macmillan Education: Basingstoke, 1988. 65-111.
- STRATTON, Royal B. *Life among the Indians: Being an Interesting Narrative of the Captivity of the Oatman Girls*. San Francisco: Whitton, Towne and Co's Excelsior Steam Power Presses, 1857.
- . *Captivity of the Oatman Girls*. New York: Carlton and Porter, 1858.
- STROBEL, Margaret. "Gender and Race in the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Empire," in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*. Eds. R. Bridenthal et al. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.
- STRONG, Pauline Turner. *Captive Selves, Captivating Others: The Politics and Poetics of Colonial American Captivity Narratives*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999.
- TAYLOR, Edith S., and William J. Wallace. "Mohave Tattooing and Face-Painting." *Southwest Museum Leaflets* 20: 1947. 1-13.
- TODD, John. *The Lost Sister of Wyoming: An Authentic Narrative*. Northampton: J. H. Butler, 1842.
- VAUGHAN, Alden T. and Edward W. Clark, Eds. *Puritans Among The Indians. Accounts of Captivity And Redemption 1676-1724*. New York: Garland, 1981.
- WICKSTROM, Stefanie. "The Politics of Forbidden Liaisons. Civilization, Miscegenation, and Other Perversions." *Frontiers* 26.3: 2005. 168-19.
- WILLIAMS, John. *The Redeemed Captive Returning to Zion*. Bedford, Massachusetts: Appelwood Books, 1853.