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Going Native: Captive Narratives in the Atlantic World

For Whites held captive in the early Atlantic world, the creation of their narratives required much more than simply surviving to tell the tale. Studying Spanish, Portuguese, and English captivity narratives produced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Lisa Voigt conducts a broad comparative analysis of European and European American narratives that discussed the ex-captives' role in "the production of knowledge identity, and authority in the early modern imperial world" (p. 1). Voigt's attention in the book moves quickly from the Mediterranean Sea to the early modern Atlantic world to demonstrate the enormous importance in which White ex-captives were held. Though she discusses English-American narratives, like the one about Pocahontas, Voigt successfully avoids the typical English-centric captivity scholarship. Opening a new line of inquiry, Voigt primarily engages Iberian sources, notably that of the Peruvian historian El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, the Chilean soldier Francisco Núñez de Pineda y Bascuñán, and the Brazilian friar José de Santa Rita Durão.

Voigt's work makes a significant contribution to the study of the Atlantic world and, as such, it will be an asset in classrooms focused on interdisciplinary and comparative studies. By using fictional, nonfictional, canonical, and otherwise little-known works that predated the Scientific Revolution, Voigt significantly illustrates the value of literature as a source of historical analysis by highlighting the importance of the creation of knowledge in the circulation of texts, discourses, and peoples in the Atlantic world. Through a close analysis of these sources, Voigt contends that the captive narratives were central in producing more than knowledge about the non-European worlds; they helped to create a European identity in opposition to the non-White "Other" and they also defended the cultural and ideological borders of the empire. The authors that Voigt considers utilized the knowledge they acquired as intermediaries between native societies and European cultures not only to assert the importance of their role to serve imperial authorities, but also to spread their larger messages about the cross-cultural impact of colonization on both sides of the Atlantic. Voigt's work, interestingly, reveals that although many of these ex-captives and their stories complicated national, religious, and cultural identities, they ultimately never undermined imperial objectives or the hierarchies that accompanied them.

However, Voigt leaves an important component out of her conclusion: while the ability of these captives to assimilate empowered them as unique historical actors, it also fundamentally limited the effectiveness of their writings in the context of imperial Europe's legacy in the Americas. The distinctive experiences of captives could render them heroes, but the common conflation of captivity and racial intermingling led many European readers to view ex-captives suspiciously–and herein lies the problem with any facile conclusion based on these sources. Ex-captives threatened imperial stability because their adventures have led them to become some sort of anomalous creatures who sat between barbarity and civilization. They were "barbarians with reason" (i.e., barbarians with capacity for logical thinking), as one Spanish soldier claimed. Voigt clarifies that "it is precisely the freedom from Christian constraints and the resulting temptation to 'go native' that makes captives and

mestizos such threatening figures.... They obscure the clear demarcation of adversaries on a colonial frontier" (p. 12). That conception of captivity underlined the writings of all of the captive narratives written for European audiences. It forced these ex-captives, early modern Atlantic authors, returnees from "the Other" world, to walk a tight line while writing about their experiences as they tried to offer themselves as intermediaries for the benefit of the Crown.

In most circumstances, Christian identity formed the crux of the captive's later legitimacy to imperial authority. In the narrative, the captive could enjoy relative flexibility in his role, allowing himself partial assimilation into his captor's society, as long as he conducted himself as a good Christian. Within "captive discourse," captives could acclimate and learn, but they ultimately belonged to the Christian world. Only certain practical flexibility, then, was admitted for the Christian captive to temporarily adapt to his indisposition as a captive if his narrative had any chance of becoming valuable to the Crown. He had to remain a Westerner at heart. Even Garcilaso seemed to have thought in this way when he voiced strong disapproval of Spaniards who abandoned their culture of origin and their Christian values. Pineda, like Garcilaso, distinguished between faithless renegades and Christian captives, even claiming that native populations also looked down on those "heretics" who "went native" (p. 187).

In addition, although Pineda experienced what he described as a positive experience in captivity, he had to cling to his Christian identity in his writing to demonstrate to Spanish authorities that he did not "go native" then. For instance, when Pineda related an incident in which he danced and participated in his captor's *fiesta*, he described his involvement as a strategy in diplomacy: he improved intercultural relations by not being rude. He claimed to have used his position as a cultural mediator to lessen hostilities as he simultaneously promoted the reciprocal acceptance of Christian practices. He therefore presented his ability to temporarily conform to "the Other" as a quality that served imperial goals rather than subverting them.

Readers of the captive-narratives expected that their hero-captives would have been genuinely exposed to and yet not absorbed by "the gaze" of "the Other" while in captivity. In fact, it was that crossing beyond the imperial margins, the process of learning to see through the eyes of "the Other," that made their narratives so precious to the West. But they were not simply fascinated with the exotic. Western empires were also determined to develop mechanisms for dominating the non-Europeans. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, these narratives were welcomed but with deep skepticism (and thus hardly believed fully), and therefore produced in such constraining ideological structures that they were rendered almost valueless in contrast to their authors' original intent.

Within their narratives, Garcilaso and Pineda both accounted for indigenous resentment of Spaniards who devastated native lands, but they tried to present this criticism in a way that made them critical only of certain methods rather than of the overall goal of empire. For instance, Garcilaso's writing aimed "to locate the origin of discord between Spaniards and Amerindians in Spanish treachery while making native hostility the ostensible focus of the narrative" (p. 110). He favorably portrayed captives who fostered mutual knowledge and respect as they mediated between cultures, allowing them to promote his belief in adaptation as a strategy for the work of conquest. As Voigt points out, although this method never alleviated tensions at the heart of these conflicts, Garcilaso tried to manipulate his story to fit into and yet challenge the imperial meta-narrative.

In his captive narrative, Pineda also carefully employed a clever strategy to criticize Spanish behavior that he claimed perpetuated wars against the indigenous people in Chile. He sought to explain to the Spanish sovereigns, to whom he dedicated his work, the reasons for the existence of such irritating conflicts in this far-off colony. The purpose was not, however, to suggest that the Spanish should remove themselves from the region. Pineda's presentation of captive narratives did challenge the European-constructed boundaries of identity, but he encouraged that those boundaries simply be redrawn rather than eliminated; he hoped that those suggestions would enable the Crown to find a more effective means to pacify the Indians. It is important to reinforce that he remained loyal to the Spanish Crown by offering constructive criticism that stopped short of deconstructing those categories.

As Voigt explains, "for Pineda, peaceful intercultural relations are best promoted, not by assimilation, but by efforts to make the captive's [European] culture understandable and desirable to the foreign society" (p. 187). Pineda seemed to recognize, unlike Garcilaso, that assimilation did not ultimately provide a viable option for diplomacy because assimilation only acceptably moved in one direction: toward the Iberian. Despite the critical nature of Pineda's narrative, the Spanish accepted his

emphasis on acclimating the native population toward European practices rather than the other way around when attempting to engender positive relationships between the two.

In contrast, Garcilaso's work fell short of pleasing his Spanish audiences, and because of this it was censored in the eighteenth century on the grounds that it promoted violence. Voigt notes, "Whether or not Garcilaso was fully aware of the implications of his attempt to confuse cultural categories and assert his conflictive identity, the insistent presence of confusion in his work suggests that the only way to promote coexistence is to acknowledge the violent sources of that confusion, not erase or ignore them" (p. 149). While shrewd, Voigt's analysis ignores the fact that Garcilaso is the only author in her book to explicitly identify himself with "the Other," the Amerindians. Indeed, Garcilaso unambiguously affirmed that the Indians and he belonged to a single "nation" (p. 320). This implied some sort of universal humanity and a relationship of brotherhood. By becoming one with "the Other" and endorsing in this way the captive's adaptation of the native, Garcilaso went too far in the direction of the indigenous people. Contrary to what Voigt openly acknowledges, this decision limited Garcilaso's potential to actually affect the imperial legacy he sought to influence. In comparison to other, more conservative captive narratives, his writing made less of an impact on the Iberian Atlantic world because he did not shape his narrative close enough to imperial prescriptions.

Voigt states that captive narratives revealed tensions within imperial projects because ex-captives and American-born writers could appropriate the valorization of firsthand knowledge to authorize "suspect, if not subaltern, voices" (p. 29). However, there is much more behind the scenes than this, as Voigt also acknowledges. While these tales of captives somewhat defended the people as well as the natural environment of the New World from allegations of inferiority and perversity, the authors could only present their arguments within the confines of a European identity that valued imperial priorities above insightful, accurate knowledge gained through assimilation.

Going beyond Voigt's claim then, I argue that the success of any given captive narrative pivoted on its position of assimilation. Even implying the possibility of incorporating elements of non-Western culture resulted in ostracism and silence. The risks of "going native" were that nobody would listen. Eventually, the empire's strict interpretations of appropriate assimilation blunted the messages that the authors of these captive narratives wanted to share. In other words, these published narratives that widely circulated among readers across the Atlantic world were far from being the true representations of the ex-captives' views and served little purpose as such. The ideological structures in which these texts were supposed to operate did not allow for the captive's true experiences to have been expressed in writing. The purging and sanitizing of these texts happened either by circumscribing the works to fit the framework set by the imperial powers or eliminating them altogether, as in the case of Garcilaso's work.

Imperial powers controlled the production and reproduction of written knowledge and sifted through those narratives that would circulate and make a lasting impact on people. As a result, the people most in touch with "the Other" could only publicly hold them at arm's length, limiting the potency of their critiques and their understandings of a very different but equally valuable portion of humanity. The strictly enforced binary between the European Christian and the American "Other" silenced the potential power of assimilation to have an impact on the legacy of the New World because an assimilated identity fell somewhere between the two fixed identities. And thanks, in part, to Voigt's efforts in this book, we are now closer to understanding the complicated nature of these Atlantic world issues.

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