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Negotiating Genre and Captivity Octavia Butler's Survivor

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NEGOTIATING GENRE AND CAPTIVITY

Octavia Butler's *Survivor*

by Maria Holmgren Troy

Throughout her oeuvre, African American science fiction writer Octavia Butler has focused her fiction on alternative family constellations, many of which have included extra-terrestrial aliens. In some of her stories, the figure of the orphan plays a leading role.¹ One of these orphans is Alanna in *Survivor* (1978), who grows up as a wild child outside civilization on a future Earth. The story of Alanna's life as a teenager and young adult is one of adoption, negotiation, and adaptation. Like quite a few of Butler's protagonists, she has to deal with the repercussions of a mixed heritage and of being a woman of color in an intolerant, patriarchal community. There is also a mixture and negotiation of genres in *Survivor*: although it is clearly a science-fiction novel that both uses and revises major themes of that genre, I will show that the novel also engages with the genre of the Indian captivity narrative.² I will suggest that Butler employs the orphan of color as a figure of difference as she draws on these genres, which have traditionally featured white protagonists and addressed white audiences.

Indeed, Butler's novel and protagonist demonstrate the tensions, contradictions, and possibilities of the captivity narrative as a carrier of cultural memory. As Jan Assmann has observed, cultural memory is "made visible in signs, symbols, images, texts, and rituals" (95). It forms the basis of, for instance, communal and national belonging and can have a bonding and even normative function. Written texts in particular open up new possibilities for cultural memory, since what is written down can be stored. Thus, the written text can serve both to perpetuate memory, to canonize it, and to change and challenge it, as different parts of a text can be activated by different readers and writers over time.³ In the latter sense, writing works as a "locus of latency" for cultural memory (Assmann 98).

The Indian captivity narrative is a particularly interesting case in terms of American cultural memory; it has circulated for different purposes and in different forms since the seventeenth century, and, as Frances Roe Kestler observes, "the Indian captivity narrative forms a vital segment of American literature today, not only for its unique position as a separate genre, native in origin, but also for its influence on other types of writing as well as on our National culture" (xiii). Among other things, the captivity narrative has generically functioned as spiritual allegory, political propaganda, sensational adventure literature, and ethnological and historical account.⁴ The theme of Indian captivity also became important to American poets, playwrights, and novelists in the nineteenth century, as a national literature was shaped, and there are traces of the captivity narrative in sentimental, gothic, and historical fiction (Derounian-Stodola and Levernier 37–38). Apart from its occurrence in different kinds of written accounts, the captivity narrative

has spawned folkloristic tales, ballads, and legends (Derounian-Stodola and Levernier 176). In the twentieth century, the theme of Indian captivity was used in films and TV series, and the structure and imagery of the narrative have been used to shape not only adventure stories in most if not all popular fiction genres (Slotkin 25), but also accounts such as hostage narratives and narratives of alien abductions (Panay; Scott; Sturma).

Richard Slotkin has argued that the captivity myth is integral to what he calls the frontier myth. This myth is central to a specifically American ideology and identity, configured as white and Christian in opposition to Indian and savage, and it figures in a large number of different cultural and political contexts throughout American history. Slotkin uses the term "myth" in the sense of a story from a society's history that "through persistent usage" gains "the power of symbolizing that society's ideology and of dramatizing its moral consciousness—with all of the complexities and contradictions that consciousness may contain" (5). He states that

through frequent retellings and deployments as a source of interpretive metaphors, the original mythic story is increasingly conventionalized and abstracted until it is reduced to a deeply encoded and resonant set of symbols, 'icons,' 'keywords,' or historical clichés. In this form, myth becomes a basic constituent . . . of the processes of both personal and social 'remembering.' (Slotkin 5)

Examining a large number of captivity narratives by white women throughout American colonial and national history, Christopher Castiglia shows that what Slotkin sees as the captivity myth is less based on the captive women's stories than on the frames provided by ministers and editors that contain these narratives: "In the majority of captivity narratives, editors obscure and revise the captive's story in order to strengthen flagging religious devotion, to justify westward expansion and the extermination of Indians, and to create the illusion of a stable and paternal nation" (Castiglia 20). There are often glaring contradictions between the images of the helpless, passive, white woman captive in dire need of white male rescue and the savage Indians presented in the frame, and those images of the captive and her captors found in the actual captivity narrative. In fact, Castiglia suggests Indian captivity provided and provides white women with a possibility to challenge white American patriarchy by gaining access to a different culture and escaping the gender constraints of their own culture, at least temporarily. Castiglia observes that white women's captivity narratives represent "women as cunning, physically fit . . . and willing to revise their racial, gender, and national identifications" (25). Thus, "captivity accounts almost invariably challenge stereotypes of women as frail and contented innocents, and differ only in the manner of challenge and in the degree to which they simultaneously question stereotypes of Indian depravity and white moral, physical, or intellectual superiority" (Castiglia 25). Slotkin's tracing of the captivity myth and Castiglia's exploration of white women's captivity narratives depict very different possibilities for national, cultural, and individual identities. In sum, the captivity narrative can be said to illustrate cultural memory as "complex, pluralistic, and labyrinthine; it encompasses a quantity of bonding memories and group identities that differ in time and place and draws its dynamism from these tensions and contradictions" (Assmann 29). *Survivor*, I will argue, employs these

tensions and contradictions but challenges the colonial and Anglo-American bonding memories and group identities that have found support in captivity narratives.

As well as indicating the connections of *Survivor* to the captivity narrative in a more general sense, my article will discuss genre and captivity in Butler's novel in relation to two of the most well-known examples of the Indian captivity narrative: Mary Rowlandson's 1682 *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* and the as-told-to *Narrative of Mary Jemison*, first published in 1823.⁵ These two narratives represent different phases in the history of the genre, feature protagonists who were captured at different ages, and describe two very different outcomes of Indian captivity: Rowlandson was redeemed for twenty pounds by her husband, a Puritan minister, after eleven weeks and five days of captivity, whereas Jemison chose to stay with the Native Americans who had adopted her. Despite these differences, both narratives have been in circulation in new editions from their first publication until today, which signals that they are a part of American cultural memory.⁶ Because of their popularity, as well as the pervasiveness of traces of the captivity narrative in American culture, it makes sense to read them as intertexts to Butler's novel, which exhibits many of the characteristics of this type of American narrative.

Unlike Rowlandson's and Jemison's narratives, *Survivor* is set in the future. On Earth humanity has taken different forms. Telepaths with superhuman abilities rule, and they use ordinary humans, or "mutes" as they are called, as easily manipulated servants.⁷ However, both telepaths and mutes are threatened by the Clayarks—quadrupedic human mutations caused by an organism that was brought to Earth by a space expedition. Because the telepaths are mentally linked together in a pattern, they are not able to leave Earth.⁸ Due to this inability, they give some mutes a chance to break free of their servitude in order to explore and settle other planets. Thus, as Patricia Melzer has noted, *Survivor* employs one of science fiction's major themes: the migration to and colonization of other planets,⁹ and these "stories of colonization and migration of groups revisit (and/or often confirm) the complex power relations of European colonialism" (Melzer 47). In his recent book, John Rieder traces the connections between colonialism and the emergence of science fiction in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century. He concludes that "[c]olonial geography continues to provide an imaginary framework for much science fiction throughout the twentieth century" and that "[t]he commercial success of the ongoing installments of *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* over the last three decades of the twentieth century attests to the enduring appeal of such quasi-colonial adventure" (Rieder 146–47). Butler's science-fiction novel does not confirm but unsettles colonial power relationships, which Melzer also makes clear (58), although it certainly revisits European colonialism. It does that at least partly, I would argue, through the cultural memory of captivity narratives. As Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola and James Arthur Levernier point out, the first captivity narratives, written in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, "were essentially the result of New World colonization by European nations" (16–17). *Survivor* engages with the colonial aspects of the two genres, which actually facilitates the merging of them in the novel.

Religious motivations for colonization are evident both in *Survivor* and in Rowlandson's narrative. In Butler's novel, a group of mutes called Missionaries has landed in a lush valley on a blue planet, a second Earth, which they call Canaan. As the name of this group indicates, these people are deeply religious: "The Missionaries had made a religion of maintaining and spreading their own version of humanity—a religion that had helped

them to maintain humanity back on Earth" (*Survivor* 5).¹⁰ Their Mission is "to spread the Sacred Image to one more world," which effectively precludes any positive spiritual or physical interchanges with others as there is not even a pretense of a possibility for an alien's conversion to this religion, literally embodied by the Missionaries themselves (*Survivor* 33). The Bible guides them, and they interpret their conditions in terms of this book. The Missionaries' worldview thus has aspects in common with that of Puritan Mary Rowlandson. As Richard VanDerBeets points out in his discussion of the Indian captivity narrative as an American genre, "the Puritan settlers extended their typology to encompass the American Indians as Canaanites who the Lord had promised Moses would be driven from the land to make way for the Neo-Israelites" (1). There are also obvious similarities between the Missionaries' arrival on a new planet, aptly named Canaan, and the Puritans' coming to the New World.¹¹

Like the Puritans, the Missionaries encounter native inhabitants. They are the fur-covered Kohn, or more precisely two warring tribes of Kohn: the Garkohn and the Tehkohn. These tribes are hierarchically organized in clans on the basis of their different colors and nuances of colors. They range from yellow through green to blue: the bluer a person is the higher the rank. The Tehkohn have two Hao—a Hao is a very blue leader who keeps the people together in harmony—and a number of blue-green judges. In contrast, the Garkohn do not have a Hao, and their hunters, who are less blue than the judges, killed their judges to gain power. Apart from Hao, judges, and hunters, who are all fighters, there are two nonfighter clans: the artisans and the farmers, who are smaller and more yellow than the fighters.¹² Emotions are indicated by a temporary shift in color, and the Kohn also have chameleon-like abilities to blend in with the environment and make themselves invisible, especially to the Missionaries. However, the Missionaries assume that they are superior to the fur-covered natives, although they soon become allied with the closest tribe, the Garkohns. Hence, the Missionaries' attitudes and behavior towards the native inhabitants are similar to those of colonial Americans towards Native Americans.

In this connection, Butler confounds the conventional colonial conquest narrative, since the Missionaries' prejudiced assumptions about the Kohn as well as their ignorance about their environment prove to be detrimental to the Missionary settlement and mission.¹³ As Melzer puts it, "Canaan turns into a parody of the Garden of Eden; its promise to the settlers is a lie" (64). For instance, they do not know that the fruit and other food made out of the meklah tree, which grows abundantly in the valley, are addictive. Moreover, during the first three years, there are three raids on the settlement in which Missionaries are abducted. The first one is conducted by the Tehkohn, but the other two are carried out by the Garkohn, who pretend that their enemies are to blame. In these two raids, the Garkohn abduct some of the Missionaries in order to crossbreed with them to form a tie and, thus, according to Garkohn custom, make the whole Missionary community a Garkohn clan. Since crossbreeding is an unthinkable abomination from a Missionary perspective—their Mission is after all to preserve and spread their own version of humanity, their own specific physical appearance—the Garkohn use the Missionaries' meklah addiction to manipulate those they have abducted. In this scenario of alien abduction, Butler's novel resonates with anxieties about miscegenation and hybridization expressed in captivity narratives as well as in the alien abduction narratives that began to circulate in American culture in 1961 (Panay 205, 213).

Survivor also explores the tensions between captivity, family, and cultural belonging, which are prevalent in captivity narratives. The Tehkohn foray, which actually takes place due to the Garkohn using the Missionary settlement as a base to raid the Tehkohn, results in the captivity of Alanna, the Missionary leader Jules Verrick's adopted daughter. Before the adoption, she was a wild human orphan who had had to fend for herself after her parents were killed by Clayarks when she was eight years old. When she is about fifteen she is caught stealing from the Missionaries' cornfield back on Earth. She says, "They shot me, would have killed me, but [Verrick] stopped them. Then he carried me back to his house, got a doctor to tend my wound, and announced that he and his wife were adopting me" (*Survivor* 1). In other words, the Missionaries capture Alanna before she is adopted by two of them. In his essay on Rowlandson's, Jemison's, and Hannah Dustan's narratives, Edward W. Griffin argues that "Adoption is still captivity, though in a milder form, for the basic elements of captivity are present. The adopted person surrenders his or her identity, accepting a new identity and a new name, a new language, new clothes, new duties, a new life" (Griffin 46). In *Survivor*, when Alanna is captured by the Tehkohn and is the only one of the captured Missionaries and Garkohns to survive the initial "cleansing," the five-day meklah withdrawal period, she sees her present situation as being similar to what she experienced when she was first adopted by the Verricks on Earth.¹⁴ Before she learned to love her adopted parents, her reasons for staying with them were "[f]ood, shelter, warm clothing, kindness" (*Survivor* 32), so when her Tehkohn captors tell her that they will teach her Tehkohn ways, she is relieved: "It would only be the Missionary experience again then. In exchange for food, shelter, and safety, I would learn to say the right words and observe the right customs—change my cultural 'coloring' again and fade into Tehkohn society as much as I could" (*Survivor* 49). Butler's novel highlights that adoption and captivity may share some features, but it is significant that Alanna's identity and name are never at stake, although she is ready to adapt.

As can be observed in the quotation above, Alanna is not only the protagonist of the novel, but also one of its narrators, and most of what happens in *Survivor* is seen from her point of view. Her first-person narrative perspective may initially seem to have much in common with that of the Indian captivity narratives.¹⁵ However, there are important differences: Alanna is in many ways defined as the other in the Missionary community, which is different from, for instance, Mary Rowlandson's status in the Puritan community, and she is actually only one of two first-person narrators in the novel. The other one is Diut, the Tehkohn Hao who becomes her husband. Each chapter is divided into a first-person section, told either by Alanna or Diut, and a third-person section, which is focalized through Alanna. The first-person sections deal with events from Alanna's first encounter with the Missionary community to the handing over of her and Diut's child, Tien, to a couple of Tehkohn artisans who will be Tien's "second-parents." The third-person sections cover Alanna's return to the Missionary community and her helping the Missionaries to get out of the valley and thus out of the grasp of the Garkohn. This somewhat eccentric structure makes the time shifts easy to follow, with the third-person sections taking place later than the first-person ones. But, more importantly, the first-person sections also underscore the dialogue between Alanna and Diut and add an element that is missing in traditional captivity narratives: the first-person voice of the ethnic or alien other. The third-person sections underline that Alanna has greater possibilities to develop outside the Missionary

community in which she will always be the third person, slightly outside and prevented by Missionary prejudice from entering a real dialogue.

In Alanna's relationship to her foster parents, the Verricks, another feature of the captivity narrative is brought to the fore. As Diana Loercher Pazicky observes, "Despite the permutations of the captivity narrative as a genre, the thread that unites its various versions is the emphasis on family, not only the pain of separation but the *danger* of separation, which can mean the loss of cultural identity" (93–94). In Butler's novel, the danger of separation is highlighted in the father-daughter relationship: the novel begins with Alanna saying, "I didn't know enough to appreciate my foster father the way I should have when we met back on Earth" (*Survivor* 1), and ends with him hitting her and walking away from her. Butler has stated in interviews that she likes "to use names that work with who my characters are" ("Interview," McCaffery and McMenamin 68), and appropriately, Alanna means "my child" (Foster 42). Jules Verrick sees her as his child until she openly challenges the very cornerstone of his religious belief. This happens when he realizes that Alanna will stay with Diut.

It then becomes obvious that Verrick's assumptions about the Kohn echo Mary Rowlandson's Puritan ones about the Native Americans: "It may even be that God has set the Kohn here to test us, try our faith" (*Survivor* 185).¹⁶ Alanna is finally seized by ice cold anger and replies:

"That is foolishness. You know it is. Souls! When have you seen your own soul—that you're so certain you have one? And for that matter, when have you seen your God?"

It was a mistake. She knew it before the words were out, but she had not been able to hold them back. She and Jules glared at each other in open hostility until she spoke again. "You know Diut is a man, as you are a man. Otherwise, how could I have borne his child?"

He hit her. He had never done such a thing before. He seemed surprised that he had done it now. She had not moved except as the blow moved her. She stood looking at him.

"Good-bye, Lanna."

Her anger drained away and she looked at him sadly. "For a while I was your daughter. Thank you for that anyway."

He turned and walked away. (*Survivor* 185)

It is clear in this passage that Verrick does not accept Alanna's husband and her acceptance of Tehkohn culture. To borrow the words of a critic reading captivity narratives, "a child's decision to make the ethnic Other the ethnic Norm becomes a shattering rejection of both cultural and parental authority in a world that insists upon a privileged genealogical principle and dichotomous cultures" (Baum 74). It is precisely such a world that Jules Verrick and the Missionaries try to maintain, and also precisely such a world that Alanna rejects through her crossing of boundaries between species and cultures when she chooses a Tehkohn husband and a life and career in the Tehkohn community. Hence, although Diut is an alien Other instead of an ethnic Other, the cultural and parental dynamics involved here are very close to those of the captivity narratives.

Interestingly, in the context of science fiction, it is possible to see Alanna—and by extension *Survivor*—as a child of Butler’s imagination, and the name “Jules Verrick” as a reference to Jules Verne, who is sometimes considered to be the “father of science fiction.”¹⁷ Verne is regarded as one of the most important “pioneers of the tale of the extraordinary voyage into outer space, the most typical of all science-fictional themes” (James 16), which as indicated above is one of the premises of *Survivor*. Verrick’s wife is called Neila, which if the letters are reversed spells “alien.” Thus, in this allegorical reading, Octavia Butler’s wild child is adopted by the white science-fiction tradition with its domesticated aliens, a tradition which her transgressive work challenges; consequently, the genre and its audience’s generic expectations are forced to expand in order to contain *Survivor*. Butler stated in an interview in the late 1970s that what she would really like her novels to accomplish is to “make people feel comfortable with characters who are not all male, who are not all white, and who just don’t fit. Who are not middle class, who don’t fit the stereotype” (“Butler Interviewed” 31). Elsewhere, about a year later, she points out that science fiction writers have a chance to make unfamiliar ideas more familiar “by including them within good entertaining stories,” but “[u]nfortunately . . . many of the same science fiction writers who started us thinking about the possibility of extraterrestrial life did nothing to make us think about here-at-home human variation—women, blacks, Indians, Asians, Hispanics, etc” (“Future” 60). She adds, “In science fiction of not too many years ago, such people either did not exist, existed only as oddities, or existed as stereotypes” (“Future” 60). In the 1970s, Butler was of course not the only American woman writer using the conventions of science fiction while simultaneously challenging their patriarchal biases. It was a decade when feminist science fiction marked one of the most significant new trajectories of the genre (Luckhurst 172, 182). As Roger Luckhurst has remarked, American women writers were actually accepted within the “established network” of science fiction: “Ursula Le Guin, Joanna Russ, James Tiptree [Alice B. Sheldon] and Octavia Butler, for instance, not only published in SF magazines and publishing houses, but were also quickly accepted, dominating the Hugo and Nebula awards in the early 1970s” (182). As an African American woman writer, though, Butler was alone in writing science fiction, and some twenty years later Mark Dery ponders the dearth of African American science fiction writers in general. To the best of his knowledge, “only Samuel R. Delany, Octavia E. Butler, Steven Barnes, and Charles Saunders have chosen to write within the genre conventions of SF” (Dery 8). Dery finds this “especially perplexing in light of the fact that African-Americans are, in a very real sense, the descendants of alien abductees” (8). As indicated above, Butler deals with alien abduction and captivity in *Survivor*, but not directly in the context of American slavery.

However, *Survivor* is the only one of her novels that Butler can be said to have “orphaned.” It is not in print and has not been reprinted since the early 1980s. In interviews, Butler has said that she is embarrassed about aspects of this novel, especially about her “human characters going off to another plan[e]t and finding other people they could immediately start having children with” (“Interview,” Kenan 500).¹⁸ Nevertheless, historian of science Donna Haraway, who has drawn on Butler’s work for her theories, has adopted the phrase “the Sacred Image of the Same” from *Survivor*.¹⁹ Haraway states, “If you retell the history about what it means to be white, then you see the perversion of the compulsion to reproduce the sacred image of the Same: the compulsion of race purity and the control

of women for the reproduction of race purity" ("Cyborgs" 12). She continues, "And if you foreground the stories of captivity and conquest and nonoriginality, the New World then has a different set of stories attached to it" ("Cyborgs" 12).²⁰ Thus, in spite of certain biological improbabilities that Butler later came to dislike in her novel, *Survivor* does the work that she wants to see done in science fiction and that Haraway uses in her theories: it features a protagonist who is not middle-class, white, and male, and who does not fit easily into the communities in which she lives and survives; and it shows "the perversion of the compulsion to reproduce the sacred image of the Same."

Appropriately, Alanna is Afro-Asian. The white Verricks do not consider this to be a reason not to adopt her, but other Missionaries do. While Alanna is recuperating from her gunshot back on Earth, an older Missionary woman visits Neila. She says, "Neila, I've been talking to some of the others and they agree. If we're going to keep the girl in the colony, surely she'd be happier with her own kind. . . . the girl isn't white" (*Survivor* 31). It is through this interchange Alanna first learns "how important some Missionaries believed their own coloring to be" (*Survivor* 31). Transracial adoption was topical during the 1970s when Butler wrote the novel. The increased availability of contraception and legal rulings regarding abortion meant that it was increasingly difficult for white, middle-class families to adopt "racially and ethnically 'matched' children" at a time in the twentieth century when domestic adoption was at an all time high in the United States (Satz and Askeland 45–46). As a result, many white, middle-class couples—the largest group of prospective adoptive parents—became interested in adopting nonwhite children (Satz and Askeland 46). In the wake of the civil rights movements, this development was problematic—not least due to historical and cultural reasons having to do with the forced removal of African American and Native American children from their ethnic communities. In *Survivor*, Butler complicates this question of ethnic belonging and adoption further. As Neila points out to her neighbor, there are no people of Alanna's "own kind" in the Missionary community; the Verricks have already turned down the black families who have shown an interest in adopting her, but they would not have been a complete racial match to Afro-Asian Alanna anyway.²¹

It is in fact Jules and Neila's initial acceptance and tolerance of Alanna's differences—as a wild human of mixed racial origins—which save her from being killed by the Missionaries and also allow her to be their child without internalizing Missionary ideology.²² Although they would like her to become a Missionary, all they ask is that she "put on a good act" for her own protection when she is with other Missionaries. Alanna says about her foster father,

Perhaps during that early period, he was too tolerant himself, though, too willing to let me stand apart from his people as I was naturally inclined to do. Perhaps there was a time when I could have become a Missionary if he had insisted, pushed me. But as it happened, it was best for him, for his people, and especially for me, that he did not insist. Best that when we left Earth and settled on our new world, I became something else entirely. (*Survivor* 2)

What Alanna becomes, like many "white Indians" who returned home on the northern frontier during colonial times in America, is an intermediary between the settlers and the native inhabitants (Calloway xi).

However, as Alanna's experiences with the Missionaries have indicated, there may be physical as well as emotional obstacles involved in this process of adaptation or transculturation. When Alanna comprehends that she is the only one left of the captives, and looks at the Tehkon Cheah's furry face, she feels totally alone and doubts that she will ever be able to blend in. Cheah understands what she feels, but tells Alanna to learn and become one of the Tehkohn: "Don't use your differences to isolate yourself. If we are not offended by them, why should you worry?" (*Survivor* 51). What Alanna is about to discover is that the color-conscious, furry Tehkohn will accept her and her differences much more readily than the Missionary community did. Here, there is another parallel between Tehkohn-Missionary and American Indian-Puritan relations; Pazicky observes that "In general, Indian culture was far more inclusive and permeable than that of the Puritans," and "[t]he Indians treated the adoptees like their own family . . ." (94, 95).²³

There are also correspondences between Alanna's and Mary Jemison's stories in regard to the circumstances around their liaisons with high-ranking males in the native communities that have adopted them. Alanna's fear and awe when Diut sends for her, using Cheah and her husband Jeh to convey his gifts and to bring her to him,²⁴ mirror that of Jemison's when her Seneca sisters tell her to go and live with Sheninjee: "Not daring to cross them, or disobey their commands, with a great degree of reluctance I went; and Sheninjee and I were married according to Indian custom" (Seaver 33). Jemison describes him as "a noble man; large in stature; generous in his conduct; courageous in war; a friend to peace; and a great lover of justice" (Seaver 33), a description that could also be used for the Tehkohn Hao, Diut, in *Survivor*. Although Sheninjee's physical traits must have been at least somewhat less alien to her than Diut's to Alanna, Jemison states, "Yet, Sheninjee was an Indian. The idea of spending my days with him seemed perfectly irreconcilable to my feelings" (Seaver 33). Nonetheless, like Alanna, Jemison finds that her fears concerning the relationship are unfounded: "his good nature, generosity, tenderness, and friendship towards me, soon gained my affection; and strange as it may seem, I loved him!" (Seaver 33).

The Tehkohn's acceptance of Alanna's differences will lead to her realization when she carries Diut's child that there is no return for her, since the Missionaries are bound not to accept her child while the Tehkohn will: "I could never think of returning to [the Missionaries] with a 'half-human' child. Nor could I think of abandoning such a child, who would surely be different and as much alone in its strangeness as I was" (*Survivor* 163). This insight may be compared to one of Mary Jemison's reasons for staying with the Native Americans: "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 cold indifference, which I thought I could not endure" (Seaver 65).²⁵ This is not the only reason why Alanna and Jemison choose to stay in their adopted native communities: they are both accepted as full members before they have children, which is different from Alanna's situation in the Missionary community.

Alanna's reference to her own "strangeness" can be seen as alluding to her as different in both the Missionary and the Tehkohn community. Intra- and inter-communal differences are brought up in various ways in *Survivor*, not least in connection with couples. The Tehkohn couple that Alanna first stays with is considered an unusual one within their community, since Cheah belongs to the (green) hunter clan and Jeh is a (blue-green)

judge. Choosing each other, they have broken tradition and transgressed the boundary between the two clans: "Neither of their clans wished to have them marry out. But they fought all challengers for their right to do so . . ." (*Survivor* 25). Later Diut says about his and Alanna's relationship: "I valued her. Valued even her unheard of disregard for the blue because it made our relationship different from any I could have with a Tehkohn woman. A relationship of the kind Jeh and Cheah had where differences existed, but were ignored" (*Survivor* 113). I would argue, though, that in Diut and Alanna's relationship differences are negotiated and accepted rather than ignored. Diut is the least human-like character in the novel: Alanna characterizes him as "an intensification of everything nonhuman in the Kohn" and "frighteningly alien. No Missionary would see him as simply a caricature of the Sacred Image" (*Survivor* 92, 59). Diut first describes Alanna as "ugly almost beyond description," but he later admits that there was "a strange beauty to her when one did not try to fit her into the Kohn image—when one did not see her as a twisted Kohn" (*Survivor* 72, 150).²⁶ At first, Alanna is repelled and frightened by Diut's differences, while her differences as well as her fighting spirit awaken his curiosity, which is why he wants a liaison with her. On the night when she is led to Diut's apartment, they engage in a long dialogue, which includes expressions of how alien they find each other. Although Diut has difficulties imagining that anyone would refuse a liaison with a Hao, he finds himself negotiating the terms of their relationship with Alanna: "I have never bargained for a mate before. I had to find my way," he tells her (*Survivor* 100). Surprisingly, what Alanna finds most appealing this first night with Diut is his fur, which must be regarded as one of his more alien features. Diut tells her, "I find your smoothness pleasing too" (*Survivor* 100). This verbal negotiation and acceptance of physical and cultural differences is a central trait of Butler's novel, although it also highlights the obstacles involved in intercultural encounters.

It is obvious that language plays an important part in cross-cultural interchange, cultural belonging, and adoption.²⁷ In *Survivor* these aspects of language are brought up time and again in different contexts. When Alanna is saved and adopted by the Verricks back on Earth, according to the doctor who tends her wounds, her status as a human being depends on her ability to speak intelligibly (*Survivor* 1). Moreover, Alanna is actually the first of the Missionaries to learn Garkohn. She wants to learn the language because she is afraid of living among people she cannot understand, and because the Garkohn pick up English so quickly. The emotional impact of speaking the same language is illustrated by Alanna's teaching Diut how to speak English, and the significance of language for cultural belonging through adoption is made explicit when Geh tells Alanna in Garkohn that since the Tehkohn is her people now she must learn to speak as they do (*Survivor* 51). In this context, Mary Jemison points out that her Seneca "sisters were diligent in teaching me their language; and to their great satisfaction I soon learned so that I could understand it readily, and speak it fluently" (Seaver 31). Both Mary Jemison and Alanna also experience times of resistance to their acculturation into new language communities, resistance connected to the English language. Jemison states that at a point when she had "been with the Indians something over a year, and had become considerably habituated to their mode of living, and attached to my sisters, the sight of white people *who could speak English* inspired me with an unspeakable anxiety to go home . . ." (Seaver 32, emphasis added). Similarly, when Alanna is on her way to be integrated into the Tehkohn community, she speaks English aloud to herself when she finds herself longing to see another Missionary (*Survivor* 56).

When Alanna has begun learning the Tehkohn language, she is turned over to a couple of artisans, which is a parallel to what happens to her child and all Tehkohn children born of fighter parents. The arrangement with “second-parents” appears to be a way to secure women’s equal participation in Kohn society. Neither the Garkohn nor the Tehkohn are structured according to gender differences, which is very different from the Missionaries. For example, the Second Hunter of the Garkohn is a woman, and so is the First Judge of the Tehkohn. Also, when Diut and Alanna’s child, Tien, is born, the Tehkohn hope that she will grow up blue enough to be their next Hao, their leader. Alanna thinks that “The status of nonfighters—farmers and artisans—was in some ways similar to that of women in Missionary society. Fighters protected them, governed them, and considered it less honorable to mistreat them” (*Survivor* 125). This comment emphasizes that although gender is not considered a viable basis of hierarchical or power differences in Tehkohn society, Butler has not created an egalitarian utopia. However, this organization based on the distinctions between the colors yellow, green, and blue may be seen as laying bare the arbitrariness of similar distinctions on the basis of ethnicity and gender, and it appears to be somewhat less rigid. Although she lacks the important blue color, she is allowed to become a Tehkohn fighter and judge. Thus, Alanna is permitted to act and to develop in ways that are closed to her simply because she is a woman in the Missionary community.

Both Mary Jemison’s and Mary Rowlandson’s narratives feature transgressions of Anglo-American gender expectations. Michelle Burnham points out that “While land in Anglo-American families was owned by the husband, most Indian property was owned by families and was usually under the control of the Indian women who farmed it and inherited rights to it” (30), and Mary Jemison was a landowner among the Native Americans. In Mary Rowlandson’s case, according to Lisa Logan, making public her narrative in the first place was an act of transgression that had to be carefully framed and negotiated in order for her to claim her place as a proper Puritan woman in her society. There was also a marked difference between “Rowlandson’s goodwife status in patriarchal Puritan society” and her role as “independent producer-exchanger” among the Algonquins (Burnham 26).²⁸ Burnham sees this role as “a radical alternative to available roles for New England women” (26). Castiglia observes that it is when Rowlandson takes up this role in the “tribe’s economy,” in the eighth remove, that she also starts mentioning the Indians’ kindnesses towards her without necessarily ascribing them to God (46). He calls this her “‘adoption’ into the tribe” (Castiglia 47). Nonetheless, it is clear that Rowlandson did not fully comprehend or was not willing to acknowledge her Native American mistress Weetamoo’s status as a sachem.²⁹

In *Survivor*, the inequality between women and men in the Missionary community is emphasized by Missionary views of sexuality. Not long after the colony has been established on Canaan and long before he discovers that Kohn and humans can produce offspring together, Jules Verrick has a revealing interchange with his wife: she is bothered about the Garkohn women walking around without clothes and the Missionary boys’ reactions to this. Verrick says that those boys are just “about the same ones” who would have been “looking at goats and female dogs back on Earth” and that they won’t be able to do anything without the cooperation from the Garkohn women. He does not want to say anything that will “put the idea into the heads of those who haven’t thought of it yet,” and continues, “Unless Garkohn men begin looking at our women, I’m going to

keep quiet" (*Survivor* 164). Here Verrick categorizes Garkohn women with goats and dogs. He assumes that sexual desire—"looking"—only originates in the male: in Missionary men and Garkohn men.³⁰ There is also gender asymmetry in the way that he says that he will deal with these "inappropriate" desires if necessary: He will only do something if he catches a Missionary boy in the act with a Garkohn woman, while it will be enough of an offense for him to speak up if a Garkohn man looks at a Missionary woman. Of course, the most shocking scenarios that he conjures up here do not include one in which his adopted daughter willingly leaves the Missionary community to live with one of the native inhabitants.

In this classically patriarchal community, reminiscent of similarly structured communities throughout Anglo-American history, double standards are prevalent in regard to women's and men's sexual activities, not least premarital sex. It would for instance be near impossible for Alanna to find a husband among the Missionary men:

during my early days among them . . . I had known no better than to go to secret places where we could break Mission law together. I stopped as soon as I understood that I was risking the comfort and security that I had found with the Verricks—as soon as I understood that the men and I were "behaving like animals" together instead of marrying and keeping true human tradition. (*Survivor* 16)

The Missionary men lose interest in her since to them her earlier sexual encounters with them mean that she has transgressed the boundaries of female Missionary propriety, and, therefore, that she is not "pure" enough to marry. Alanna, who is not interested in marrying any of them, is disgusted with this incongruous way of reasoning: "I was guilty of sin, but somehow, they were all still innocent. Foolishness!" (*Survivor* 16). The Kohn, on the other hand, express their sexuality more openly, and there are no expectations of gender differences in their sexual behavior. Kohn men and women take temporary sexual partners until they have a child with somebody, who they then marry. Alanna realizes that this behavior, which the Missionaries find animal-like, lascivious, and immoral, can probably be explained by the Kohn being less fertile than the Missionaries (*Survivor* 15–16).³¹

At the time when they were first published, gender transgressions in Rowlandson's and Jemison's narratives would not have been the features that made it possible to read one as a religious allegory and the other as an historical account. Indeed, in his appendix to Jemison's narrative, Seaver emphasizes Indian women's "becoming subjection to their husbands" (120). As cultural memory in the form of written texts, though, these two narratives have provided twentieth- and twenty-first-century readers with insights into white American women's expanded potential to act in Native American communities in roles other than those prescribed by the patriarchal Anglo-American culture of their times. Another crucial aspect of the two narratives that has gained in significance is instances of transcultural negotiation, not least with a focus on language as cultural carrier.

In *Survivor*, then, Butler's introduction of a number of features that can be found in the Indian captivity narrative with a woman as its protagonist underpins her revision of the classical science fiction story of planetary conquest and colonization with a male hero. Butler further complicates the negotiation between these two genres in her novel

by introducing an Afro-Asian woman protagonist, who is an outsider or, to use Pazicky's designation, a cultural orphan in both cultures into which she is adopted. Thus, Butler employs the most American of Anglo-American prose genres and writes a story of failed colonization and of nonoriginality with a cultural orphan at its center—an orphan who is finally successfully adopted by another species.

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NOTES

1. Other examples of orphans in Butler's novels are Shori in *Fledgling* (2005) and Dana in *Kindred* (1979). For a thought-provoking discussion on family, history, memory, and genre in *Kindred*, see Rushdy.
2. The idea that *Survivor* has traits in common with the captivity narrative was first presented in a short paper at a conference at Umeå University, Sweden, in 1997. See Troy.
3. See the introduction and chapter 4 in Assmann.
4. See VanDerBeets and Derounian-Stodola and Levernier.
5. Mary Rowlandson was captured during King Philip's War in 1676. She was then around forty years old. According to Kestler, "The majority agree that Rowlandson's work was the first and best example of the genre" (xxiii). It has also been listed as "the first prose best-seller in America" (Burnham 14). See also Derounian-Stodola and Levernier 94, 99. Mary Jemison's narrative was "[c]arefully taken from her own words" by James Everett Seaver when Jemison was eighty years old. In the spring of 1755, "[s]he was captured as a [twelve-year-old] girl in the French and Indian War by a Shawnee raiding party . . . turned over to a Seneca family, adopted by them, and taken four years later to their homeland in Western New York. Here, by her own choice, she spent the rest of her life as an Iroquois wife, mother, and landed proprietor" (Trelease vi). On Seaver as editor, see Derounian-Stodola and Levernier 74.
6. For a list of editions of Rowlandson's narrative up to 1975, see Kestler 68. She points out that "[b]y the early twentieth century there were, in fact, over twenty-five editions of the Jemison narrative and over thirty of the Rowlandson" (Kestler xxv).
7. Telepathy is one important theme in science fiction. See James 92.
8. *Survivor* is one of five novels also known as the Patternist series. Some of the background to the action in the novel outlined here is found in the other novels: *Patternmaster* (1976), *Mind of My Mind* (1977), *Wild Seed* (1980), and *Clay's Ark* (1984).
9. James points out, "The exploration and conquest of space . . . is, of course, a major theme in the sf of this period [the 1950s], as in all others" (93).
10. Melzer observes that "Most colonial processes are driven and justified by religious conflicts, such as when religious minorities flee the home country to settle in a new territory and colonize the people they encounter, or when religious 'superiority' lends an ideological justification for the economic exploitation of colonized countries and cultures" (61).
11. Melzer also makes the connection between the Missionaries and the Puritans (58). She states,

In *Survivor*, the Western salvation narrative of Paradise for the Good (which echoes United States society's ideological origin as the 'City Upon the Hill' valorized by John Winthrop in 1630, which marks the God-designated position of Puritan society as chosen and unique) is exposed as a colonial framework for racism, hypocrisy, and dishonesty, and as a justification of oppressive social practices. (Melzer).

12. Interestingly, two recent critical accounts of *Survivor* read Kohn society's hierarchal color scheme in very different ways. Melzer asserts that "[j]ust as Missionaries are exclusive in their definition of 'human,' Kohns rely on a social order reminiscent of human racism, in which color determines one's status in society—as leader, judge, artisan, and so on" (82), whereas Anderson uses a more positively loaded description of the color-conscious Kohn and contrasts them with the Missionaries: "Unlike the Missionaries, the Kohn participate in a culture predicated upon the value of color. Rather than a marker of inferiority, color, especially a certain shade of blue, carries enormous value and privilege" (42). The underlying presupposition of Melzer's assertion is that any evaluation of people in terms of color is negative, while Anderson's is that a regard for color is positive as it does not assign superiority to "colorlessness" or "whiteness."
13. In an interview in 2004, Butler explained that she "did like the idea, in *Survivor* in particular, that if we go to another world, and it happens to have other people on it, we have to come to some kind of arrangement with them. It may be a very strange arrangement, but it's not going to be cowboys and Indians or Englishmen and Africans. It's going to be something completely different because of the great distances involved . . ." ("Going to See the Woman" 32). In other words, in *Survivor* (and her short story "Bloodchild"), Butler uses the premises of space travel to challenge colonial conquest narratives.
14. Mary Jemison was in a similar situation: "Though both of her parents and her three siblings were also taken captive, she was the sole survivor of the attack" (Adams 430).
15. Scott has observed that in first-person accounts of captivity, both by colonial settlers and by Americans held hostage in Iran in 1979, the "captive brings a privileged observational stance to the culture of the other" (26), regardless of his or her knowledge or lack of knowledge of the language and culture of the captors. See Fitzpatrick for a discussion of Puritan women's captivity narratives that complicates this picture by bringing up the constraints imposed on the captives' stories by ministers and editors. See also Castiglia.
16. "[T]o the Puritan, Indian captivity was considered a religious trial sent by God for purposes known only to him" (Derounian-Stodola and Levernier 18). See also VanDerBeets 9. Also alien abductions and hostage crises can offer the captive spiritual insights. See, for instance, Sturma and Scott.
17. See for example Rose. In a historical approach to science fiction as a genre, he begins the "early phase" with Jules Verne (Rose 9–10). Another writer who has been called the "Father of Science Fiction" is H. G. Wells (James 12).
18. In this evaluation of her novel, Butler adheres to a definition of science fiction as expressed by, for instance, science-fiction writer Joanna Russ: "Science fiction must not offend against what is known. Only in areas where nothing is known—or knowledge is uncertain—is it permissible to just 'make it up'" (Russ 6).
19. See for instance Haraway, *Primate* 376, and *Simians* 276.
20. Castiglia also sees the importance of the captivity narrative as the basis for a different tradition in American literature (193).
21. In her article, Anderson argues that "Butler uses Alanna, an Afro-Asian protagonist, to illuminate strategies of negotiation for African Americans who engage in a variety of ethnic groups" (35). Anderson points out that "[b]y the time Butler pens her novel, there had been an increase in the interaction between Asians and African Americans that produced minority mixed-race children" (38).
22. Mary Jemison is an example of a captive who changed her system of belief after she was adopted. Seaver observes, "Her ideas of religion, correspond in every respect with those of the great mass of the Senecas. . . . The doctrines taught in the Christian religion, she is a stranger to" (15).
23. "The Indians also did not share the Puritans' racist prohibitions against intermarriage, so Puritan women were looked upon as suitable wives and children were eagerly sought after to replace the Indians' own dead offspring. Even male captives were considered desirable as workers and desirable replacements for fallen braves" (Pazicky 95).
24. In the appendix to Mary Jemison's narrative, Seaver brings up Native American courtship: "When an Indian sees a squaw whom he fancies, he sends a present to her mother or parents, who on receiving it consult with his parents, his friends, and each other, on the propriety and expediency of the proposed connexion. If it is not agreeable, the present is returned; but if it is, the lover is informed of his good fortune, and immediately goes to live with her, or takes her to a hut of his own preparing" (Seaver 119).
25. Mary Jemison was not alone in finding more tolerance in the Native American community that had adopted her than she expected if she were to return to the white community. In his introduction to *North Country Captives*, Calloway explains that "after adoptees had undergone the required initiation rites, they were accepted as members of the family and could expect to be treated with the respect

- and generosity that cemented relations in Abenaki communities" (x). He adds that "Abenakis were reluctant to release captives they had adopted, and captives who had been adopted often had no desire to return home" (xi). Pazicky states that "[t]he best available statistics indicate that of the known captives taken to Canada less than half returned to New England. . . . Of those choosing to remain most were young and female" (95).
26. In his discussion of colonialism and science fiction, Rieder refers to what Slavoj Žižek calls "ideological fantasies," i.e. "beliefs that we consciously disavow, recognizing them as untrue, but nonetheless support in practice" (Rieder 30). One of the most pernicious ideological fantasies has to do with racism: "We know very well that the racial other is a human being just like ourselves, but we behave under the assumption that the other is a grotesque parody of humankind" (Rieder 30). In *Survivor*, Butler exposes this fantasy by presenting the reader with both Alanna's and Diut's points of view.
 27. Even Rowlandson, who only spent a short time as a captive, picks up some of her captors' language: "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).
 28. In contrast to Burnham, Logan sees Rowlandson's bartering as a reenactment of her role as a Puritan wife: "Her industrious knitting, which enables her to barter for food and other necessities throughout her captivity is a reenactment of her role as 'deputy husband.' Laurel Thatcher Ulrich writes that a Puritan wife was a business partner in marriage, and her ability to drive a hard bargain was often necessary for economic survival" (Logan 267). It might be argued, though, that Rowlandson acts more independently among the Algonquins in spite of her status as captive. Logan also brings up the legal restrictions concerning Puritan women's ownership of property and goods.
 29. "The sachem occupies the position of highest authority in the Indian community, and Weetamoo, though nominally subject to Philip, had elected to combine her Pocasset tribal forces with the alliance formed under Philip, and shared leadership responsibility with him during the war" (Burnham 31).
 30. See Mulvey on the male gaze and scopophilia: "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female" (19).
 31. It is clear that sexuality in *Survivor* means heterosexuality and nothing else. Sexuality resulting in reproduction is important to all groups in the novel: it is the Mission of the Missionaries, and it is a way of forming a tie with a foreign people and the only valid reason for marrying and staying with one partner for the Kohn. Haraway has stated that "Octavia Butler is a very frustrating writer in some ways, because she always reproduces heterosexuality even in her polygendered species. But I am drawn to the 'nonoriginality' of her characters: as diasporic people, they can't go back to an original that never existed for them, and therefore they are not embedded in the system of kinship as theorized by Freud and Lévi-Strauss" ("Cyborgs" 12).

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