

The Representation of Arabs, Berbers and Turks in Barbary Captivity Narratives: A Literary Analysis

TITOUCHE Rachid
University/Tizi-ouzou

Abstract

The following paper is a tentative analysis of the representation of Arabs, Berbers and Turks in Barbary captivity narratives. Pegged to historicist and cultural materialist criticism, it aims at demonstrating how narration and discourse in these narratives of the Other (Algerians) function as ideological sites to service a nascent nation (America) in desperate need of usable myths.

In his introduction to *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (1991), Said observes that he uses the term of orientalism to refer to several related things at the same time. Firstly, in addition to the reference to an academic tradition, the term points to “a style of thought based on an ontological and epistemological distinction between the “Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident”. (p.2) Moreover, Said contends that this binary or Manichean style of thinking laid the foundations for accounts, theories and practices through which the latter sought to exercise its hegemony over the former at a very specific moment in modern history, which he roughly dated as the late eighteenth century. It was at this critical moment, he writes, that a third meaning of the term Orientalism took shape as a “corporate institution for dealing with the Orient –dealing with it by making statements about it, describing it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, as a style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient”.(p.3) In his account of the unfolding of orientalism in Western history, Said distinguishes three main national types that emerged in this order: British,

French and American Orientalism. In what follows, I shall not renew or explore again the heated debate that Said's book has thus far generated and to which he himself responded with his talk "Orientalism Reconsidered" at the 1984 Essex Sociology of Literature Conference. Instead, I shall see whether or not Said's critical discourse applies in the same way and for the same reasons to the Indian and Barbary captivity narratives from early colonial and early independent America.

To this end, I have divided this paper into three main parts. In the first part, I shall attempt to go into the reason(s) why captivity narratives had played a prominent role in America cultural discourse during the early colonial period. Here will be explained why I have put together what might seem at first sight such strange bedfellows as the Indian and Barbary captivity narratives. In the second part, I shall retrace very briefly the evolution of these narratives as part and parcel of the evolution of cultural discourse up to the independence period. Why Barbary captivity narratives waned and waxed, and what aesthetics came to inform them when they re-emerged in the early independence period will be among some of the questions that this part proposes to address. In the third and final part, which is the central part of this paper, I shall try to demonstrate what functions orientalism or the American intertext of the "Barbary shore" accomplished in the early independent America. In order to do so, I have selected two representative Barbary captivity narratives: Haswell Rowson's *Slaves in Algiers, or, A Struggle for Freedom* (1794) and John Foss's *A Journal of the Captivity and Sufferings of John Foss; Several Years a Prisoner in Algiers* (1798).

Let us start with what Edward Said calls the "beginning", i.e., the genealogy of the captivity narratives in colonial America. To date, research into this genealogy has been circumscribed both temporally and spatially. In other words, the birth of the captivity narrative is located in American soil and is

dated back to the publication of Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God together, with the Faithfulness of his Promises Displayed; Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restauration of Mrs Rowlandson* (1682). There is no doubt that the latter captivity is a milestone in American literary tradition, but to retrace the start of captivity narratives to it sounds, to my mind, quite arbitrary. Research into these captivity narratives shows that their discourse is just an instance of what is called "tropological discourse". (Cf. Hayden Robert, 1985) The major trope in this case is that of "captivity", which in Puritan cultural discourse is employed to describe the ontological and spiritual captive condition of humankind to sin. It is this Puritan ontology that provided the seed bed for the flourishing of Indian captivity narratives when the time came for the narration of the historical reality of the abduction of Puritan settlers by Indians during King Philip's war.

One conclusion, therefore, follows. The concrete cultural models for giving sense to accounts of captivity by Indians might well have originated in England where Puritanism was born. Indeed, the Indian captivity narratives were preceded on the British literary scene by what came down to us as the Barbary captivity narratives. The latter can be traced back to the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries when countries on both sides of the Mediterranean sought to impose their domination over a strategic area of commerce at the time. One of the earliest captivity narratives to be published in England was John Fox's captivity in Alexandria in 1563 followed by a spate of other narratives that had culminated in the formation of a whole literary tradition or oriental intertext by 1675 when William Oakley published his *Eben-Ezer or a Small Monument of Great Mercy*. This captivity narrative relates William Oakley's experiences as a prisoner of war in Algiers. According to Paul Baepler, this narrative "stylistically and cosmologically parallels what Mary Rowlandson would write

seven years later.” Baepler adds that “Like a Puritan captive in America, Oakeley interprets the suffering in Algiers as God’s trial, and he explicates his ordeal with extensive reference to the **Bible**”. (1999:6) Obviously, Baepler’s suggestion is that with the Puritan ontology at its core, Oakley’s captivity narrative could not have missed the journey to the colonial libraries of such Puritan Ministers as Rowlandson, and in due process to have supplied his wife with a concrete cultural model for making sense and narrating her captivity by Indians.

Of course, this first conclusion does not mean that literary influence across the Atlantic went in a one-way direction because the first accounts of the encounter of the English settlers with the Indians had also not failed to shed on the accounts that the English gave of their encounter with the “orient”. (Cf. Sari J. Nasir, 1976) If Rowlandson’s narrative had arguably borrowed the explanatory model for her narrative from Oakeley’s Barbary captivity narrative for rendering her experience of captivity by Indians, it had in its turn laid the ground for the circulation of the Barbary captivity narratives. According to Baepler, just three years after Rowlandson’s release from captivity in 1680, Joshua Gee, a fellow Bostonian and a shipwright by trade, was made prisoner on the North African coast while he was on a trading voyage to the Mediterranean. This Gee was released seven years later with the help of the famous judge and diarist Samuel Sewall to “give the first Barbary captivity narrative from America”. (Baepler Paul, 1999:1) Clearly, Joshua had enough time for reading Rowlandson’s account before embarking on his voyage and for patterning and circulating his Barbary narrative on her Indian captivity narrative after his release. Moreover, by the time he was liberated the genre of captivity narratives was already enshrined in the cultural discourse of the time, and the interest in such a genre ran parallel with the reading of what to all evidence was the largest single genre of that time: the sermon. There is no surprise, therefore, in the fact that the most famous Barbary

captivity narrative came “sandwiched” in Cotton Mather’s sermon: *The Glory of Goodness. The Goodness of God, Celebrated; in Remarkable Instances and Improvements thereof: And more particularly in the REDEMPTION remarkably obtained for the English Captives, Which have been languishing under the Tragical, and the Terrible, and the Most Barbarous Cruelties of BARBARY. The history of what the Goodness of God, has done for the Captives, lately delivered out of Barbary. Boston: T. Green 1703* (Sic). As the title of Mather’s sermon shows, sermons as much as captivity narratives, were circulated with the objective of religious teaching and that of moral improvement.

Now, speaking in terms of statistics, the number of Barbary captivity narratives from colonial America that have thus far resurfaced barely compares with the huge number of Indian captivity narratives from the same period. The explanation for this meagre yield of the excavation for Barbary captivity from colonial America might be summarised as follows. First, it has to be observed that the Indian captivity narrative was closer to the immediate reality of abduction by Indians at home than captivity on the distant South Mediterranean shores referred to as the Barbary Coast. With reference to this immediate historical reality that led to the production and circulation of the first Indian captivity narrative by Rowlandson, Richard Slotkin writes the following:

King Philip’s War was the great crisis of the early period of New England history. Although it lasted little more than a year, it pushed the colonies perilously close to the brink of ruin. Half the towns in New England were severely damaged – twelve completely destroyed- and the work of a generation would be required to restore the frontier districts laid waste by the conflict. (1994:55)

It is the historical reality captured in the quote above that made the Barbary captivity narrative live in the shadow of the Indian captivity narrative during the whole colonial period. This colonial period was marked by a series of Indian wars (King

Phillip's War, King William's War, King George's War) resulting in the continuing abductions of white English subjects which, naturally, fuelled the writing of Indian captivity narratives.

However, while Indian wars were raging at home in America for reasons that cannot be detailed here, the reality of abduction of New England shipwrights on the South Mediterranean shores was receding into the background of what Sir Godfrey Fisher (1957) characterised as the "Barbary legend". The capture of English subjects including New England sea men gradually became more a legend than a historical reality as peace treaties binding English subjects and the Algerians were signed and renewed all through the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. With reference to the peace relations between the North African states and Britain of the period in question, Fisher writes the following: "Apart from the period 1620 to 1682, during which there are various references to the goodwill, good faith, patience, and forbearance of their rules and the "civility" of their ships, the regencies were at peace with us up to 1816." (1957:11) These peace treaties guaranteed a relative security for peaceful English as well as New England merchants in the Mediterranean basin. Arguably, Cotton Mather's Barbary captivity narrative delivered in the form of a sermon in 1703 at the redemption of a group of American captives in Sally, Morocco constituted the highest point in the production of Barbary captivity narratives in America before their decline. In a nutshell, the "Barbary legend" that had provided the first location for the emergence of the genre of captivity narrative could not have continued to exert the same power on the Puritan imagination when the historical drama of the Indian wars was enacted on the not-distant frontier.

Another conclusion is worth drawing at this stage. While it is true to say that Indian captivity narratives held prominence over the Barbary captivity narratives in colonial America, it is also true to say that they were both rooted in the same cultural discourse. This

cultural discourse was authenticated and circulated mostly by the Puritan clergy. For example, the publishers announced the forthcoming edition of the Rowlandson narrative in the first publication of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1681). Moreover, when it was published in 1682, it was prefaced by a famous clergy man with guidelines on how to be read. More significantly, it contained a sermon related to the same theme of captivity. As for Joshua Gee's Barbary captivity narrative, it appeared in "pocketbook" form only in 1941, but Baepler lets us know that his narrative circulated orally for a time before being delivered from the pulpit by his son, also named Joshua Lee, who ministered alongside Cotton Mather at the Boston's North Church. Cotton Mather's narrative needs no comment here since it was delivered in the form of an illustration to a sermon. What is worth noting instead is the way the dominant cultural discourse encoded both the writing and the reading of these narratives. First, contrary to modern fast-paced fiction, these captivity narratives are purposively slow-paced demanding the reader to stop and meditate on the 'narrated' experiences in the light of Biblical typologies. Second, at their basis lies the Puritan covenantal ideology that subordinated the historical reality of abduction by Indians or North African sea captains to providential history. Their *ab origin* encoding as inter-texts reinforce what Edward Said refers to as a "textual attitude", an attitude that makes short shrift of historical reality in their attempt to show the hand of god in historical events and incidents such as captivity and the deserved suffering at the hands of God, his goodness and his glory at the redemption of the captive sinners. Sins were mostly related to the transgression of the Puritan moral code such as tobacco smoking, the neglect of Bible reading and the estrangement from the community of God in the not-distant frontier in Rowlandson's narrative or the "wild" shores of Barbary. In the final analysis, whether the "Wild Man" was the "Indian" in the frontier or the "Oriental" in the South

Mediterranean coast, the same Manichean style of thought that Said sees as the hallmark of orientalism was applied.

An additional point needs be clarified here before proceeding. It has to do with the historical career of the Indian captivity narrative in the period dating from the 1682 edition of the Rowlandson narrative up to independence in 1783. I have already suggested above that in the light of historical circumstances, it is perfectly understandable that the Indian captivity narratives had a deeper hold than Barbary captivity narratives on the cultural discourse of colonial America. Here, I have to add that the re-production of the Indian captivity narrative in the period when the Barbary captivity narratives were on the wane was marked by significant shifts in discourse, shifts brought about by historical changes all through the eighteenth century. The Great Awakening of the first half of the eighteenth century, the coming of the Enlightenment ideas into provincial America and the response to them were reflected or rather refracted in the literary form of the Indian captivity narratives that absorbed the literary ideologies of the sentimental and gothic fiction prevalent in Europe during the period following the publication of Rowlandson's narrative. These literary ideologies were mostly inspired from the convergence of significant developments in science, religion, epistemology and physiology. One of the most important results of these developments was the emergence of a more positive view of God and that of humans now perceived as innately compassionate beings. In literature, this major change in cultural episteme was translated into a celebration of the moral significance of sentiments. Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, a sort of captivity narrative that clergymen sometimes dared to read from the pulpit, set the cultural model for its time. Writers of captivity narratives in America did not lag behind this cultural remodelling. Captives continued to be made by Indians. However, their captivity and sufferings were looked at not only

as God's trial of the faithful as was the case in previous narratives but also as a trial of the virtue of individuals in distress. At the independence of the United States in 1783, the Indian captivity narratives had accommodated to these changes in cultural discourse without ceasing to provide an ideological platform for debating important socio-political as well religious issues. At the level of form, two aesthetic strands (Puritan and sentimental/gothic) came together and coalesced in the Indian captivity narratives that its literary kith and kin i.e., the dormant Barbary captivity narratives inherited when they resurfaced in the early independence period.

Indian captivity narratives had received a new lease of life even after independence. This was because the acquisition of Northwest Territory, the land north of the Ohio River and West of the Appalachians, as a result of the Treaty of Paris of 1783 with Britain made the Indians take to the warpath in defence of the territories sold and bought without their consent. The encroachment of the Americans on Indian territories bred out new Indian captivity narratives, but their popularity at the national level was shared, if not temporarily obscured by the Barbary captivity narratives from which, as I have suggested earlier, they partly emerged. The resurgence of the Barbary captivity narrative came as a result of the seizing of American merchant ships, the *Betsy* by Morocco in May 1784, and the *Maria* and the *Dauphin* by Algerian sea captains in the summer of 1785. If these American merchants ships were seized it was because the peace treaties binding the Regency (*odjak*) of Algiers and Britain no longer applied in the case of the independent Americans. The American prisoners in Morocco were soon liberated, but those in Algiers remained captive for more than 11 years to be joined by other prisoners made in 1793.

The reasons for this delay in the liberation of American prisoners are too complex to be detailed in such a short paper. However, some points need to be made to highlight the historical

conditions that presided over the resurgence of the Barbary captivity narratives. First, it is worth observing that captives, often individuals, in the frontier were easily redeemed because each of the Thirteen States managed to raise the necessary funds in order to ransom their respective state citizens. The case was different for the American prisoners in Algiers. The Confederation government that issued from the Articles of Confederation was not authorised to levy taxes. It wholly depended on the whims of the states constituting the union. Consequently, it was in serious shortage of money for the redemption of the initial small group of captive citizens in Algiers. Second, the crisis made the captives in Algiers captives of the ideological fight between the Federalists and anti-Federalists. Over time, however, there emerged a national consensus wherein even Thomas Jefferson the staunchest believer in anti-federalism turned out to be an unabashed Federalist. For example, in a famous letter to John Adams dated July 11, 1786 he defended his position in favour of war instead of diplomacy in a five-point argument: “1. Justice is in favor of this opinion. 2. Honor favors it. 3. It will procure us respect in Europe, and respect is a safe-guard to interest. 4. *It will arm the federal head with the safest of all instruments of coercion over their delinquent members and prevent them from using what would be less safe.* [...] 5. I think it less expensive”. (Quoted from Bergh Albert Ellery, 1904: 364)

The fourth point is pertinent to my argument about the functions of Barbary captivity narratives in the early independence period. It speaks of the very old practice of using or rather abusing foreign policy issues for solving domestic problems. At first sight, Jefferson’s argument for the construction of a navy for the strengthening of the authority of the national authority was in contradiction of his rejection of a standing army of the type through which the British exercised its tyranny in the colonial period. It may also seem as if it were in

contradiction with his agrarian philosophy with its rosy vision of the peaceful yeoman as a guardian of democracy. But on closer examination, this was only an apparent reversal of policy because Jefferson saw a big difference between a standing army and a navy. The former could strike inland and endanger that democracy which he associated with the yeoman whereas the latter could at best exercise pressure on the turbulent members on the merchant coastal cities while providing protection for its national interests abroad. It has to be reminded that the above five-point argument was made just a year before the Constitutional or Federal Convention convened (25 May, 1787) and laid down a charter that provided for a more centralized form of government. Serving as ambassadors in Europe, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams were absent during this convention. It follows that their exchange of correspondence over the issue of the prisoners in Algiers was primarily conducted with an eye to bring a solution to domestic problems (e.g. commerce between the states, foreign debt, lack of revenue, etc) that threatened to dissolve, what George Washington called with reference to the Articles of Confederation, the “rope of sand”.

This is, in short, the historical background against which the Barbary captivity narratives resurfaced in the early independence period. It is worth noting that the publication of “fictional” Barbary captivity narratives preceded what is supposed to be the “non-fictional” accounts given by the prisoners after their release. Avowedly, the immediate reason for the writing and circulation of such “fictional” narratives was a campaign for raising funds for the liberation of the prisoners. But as argued above this appeal to American sentiments was just a smokescreen because the historical reality of the imprisonment of Americans in Algiers was less important than the pretext or the occasion it provided for debating domestic issues like gender roles, black slavery, the appropriate form of government, religious tolerance and so on. Susanna Haswel Rowson’s 1794

play *Slaves in Algiers, or A Struggle for Freedom* is an illustrative example of this divide between the avowed intentions and the hidden agendas behind the renewed publication of Barbary captivity narratives. Rowson's play was part and parcel of this nationwide effort to stir the public sympathy in favour of the white captives in Algiers, but it was also used as a pretext to vindicate, among other causes, the women's rights in the new republic through the deployment of the double-fold cultural discourse of the captivity narrative.

The play is centred on two American Pamela-like figures, Rebecca and Olivia. Both of them were held slaves in Algiers, slavery being a perfect condition for testing their virtue. The 'Lovelace' villains are two patriarchal figures Muley Moloc, the Dey of Algiers, and Ben Hassen, an English Jew who "took the turban", i.e. turned Muslim renegade. Both of them pressured the American ladies to marry them. As can be expected, these American Pamelas were not only able to resist what they called oriental licentiousness disguised as love but also to indoctrinate/subvert the "Algerine" women around them with their beliefs in gender equality. One of these woman converts is Ben Hassan's daughter, Fetnah, who as the author's mouthpiece is made to utter these adulatory words in favour of Rebecca: "It was she who taught me, woman was never formed to be the abject slave of man. [...] She came from that land, where virtue in either sex is the only mark of superiority- she was an American". Conversion to the American creed goes on as the play unfolds. So, significantly, the play closes with a scene wherein Muley Moloc begs mercy from his former captives, male and female, abjuring Islamic/oriental culture and repentantly demanding his return to the American/Christian fold: "I fear from following the steps of my ancestors, I have greatly erred: teach me then, you who so well know how to practice what is right, how to amend my faults." As a response he was urged "to sink the name of subject in the endearing epithet of fellow citizen".

As the above summary shows, Rowson's rhetorical discourse goes into directions simultaneously. First, as a woman, she sought to urge the new national entity to live up to its political ideal of freedom and not marginalise women as second-class citizens. Muley Moloc and Ben Hassan are orientalised figures who stand for American patriarchs compelled by the female protagonists to abide by the new constitutional rules. Second, as an American citizen, she celebrates the moral fibre of the new nation through the heroic resistance of the American captives, both male and female, to what is described as both a tyrannical and masculine form of government in Algiers. The American male and female captives like Henry and Olivia are imagined respectively as Tom Jones and Pamela figures, who pressured both physically and morally the orientalised Lovelaces, Muley Moloc and Ben Hassen to repent their heretical lapses and to confess or recognise that Americans know better what was good for "Orientals" in general or for the people of Algiers in particular. Here is at work that dialectic of power and knowledge that Said has located at the heart of the oriental discourse and the imperial idea. This brings me to John Foss's Barbary captivity which I wish to compare with Rowsan's and Cotton Mather's narratives in order to bring further evidence of the American intertext of Algiers (the Orient) and the continuity of the Puritan interpretive tradition of captivity. John Foss's *Journal of the Captivity and Sufferings of John Foss; Several Years a Prisoner in Algiers: Together with Some Account of the Treatment of Christian Slaves When Sick: - and Observations on the Manners and Customs of the Algerines* appeared in 1798, that is four years after the publication of Rowson's play. Contrary to Rowson's narrative which more or less abided to the aesthetic agenda of American sentimental fiction that its author to a large extent initiated, Foss's account is a hybrid narrative, combining elements from both Puritan captivity narratives, and sentimental and gothic fiction. These are

obvious in the foreword that he addresses to the public. This foreword starts in a peculiarly Puritan way: “To the Public: Man seldom undertakes a more difficult, or at least a more disagreeable task, than that of relating incidents of his own life, especially where they are of a remarkable or singular nature”. (p.73) “Incidents”, “remarkable”, “singular” and other such formulaic words in both the foreword and within the text indicate the influence that captivity narratives from the colonial period still exerted on Foss. These words take us both to Rowlandson’s and Cotton Mather’s captivity narratives. Moreover, just like these colonial forebears he encoded his account with a Puritan reading practice. The “horrible” scene of the American prisoners at work in the quarries of Algiers illustrates the point I wish to make here. This scene is crafted in such a way as to make the intended reader pause in the same manner that a reader of captivity narratives in the colonial period would have done in order to meditate on it and if possible draw a parallel between captivity in Algeria and Egyptian captivity in the Old Testament.

Apart from these resonances from the Puritan brand of captivity narratives, Foss also wrote his narrative with the agenda of gothic and sentimental fiction in mind. For example, he expects that the “The tears of sympathy will flow from the humane and feeling (Sic.), at the tale of the hardships and sufferings of their unfortunate fellow countrymen, who had the misfortune to fall in the hands of the Algerines – whose tenderest mercies towards Christian captives are the most extreme cruelties”. (p.73) The end of the quote “their tenderest mercies towards Christian captives are the most extreme mercies” is an allusion to Rowlandson’s Indian captivity, but the first part of the quotation in its emphasis on tears of sympathy also sets Foss’s Barbary captivity narrative within the context of sentimental fiction, which in the early period of the American novel was best represented by Susanna Haswell’s wildly popular novel *Charlotte Temple*. There is no space here for providing illustrations from the text. So I shall simply go into the

peculiar practice of reading sentimental and gothic fiction at the time. Readers of Barbary captivity narratives often forget to set this reading practice within the prevalent cultural discourse of the time, whose hallmark according to Michel Foucault was comparison. In his development of this idea, Foucault writes: “Comparison then [the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries] can attain to perfect certainty: the old system of similitudes, never complete and always open to fresh possibilities could it is true through successive confirmations, achieve steadily increasing probability, but it was never certain. [...] The activity of the mind will therefore no longer consist in setting out on a quest for everything that might reveal some sort of kinship, attraction or secretly shared nature within them, but on the contrary, in discriminating, that is establishing their identities.” (1970:55)

It is this comparative cultural discourse that today’s reader has to keep in mind when reading Foss’s Barbary captivity narrative. In other words, the contemporary reader has to step into the shoes of the readers of early independent America to retrieve this comparative discursive attitude at the heart of all types of texts. This necessity of tuning up our contemporary reading practice to that of the readers of captivity narratives is underlined in the following quote from the *Spectator*, a journal that can rightly be considered as a guardian of the taste for the eighteenth-century readership. In one of its editorials, it was written that “When we read of torments, wounds, deaths and the like dismal accidents, our pleasure does not flow so properly from the grief which such melancholy description gives us, as from the secret comparison which we make between ourselves and the person who suffers. Such representations teach us to set a just value upon our own condition, and make us prize our good.” (Quoted in Ebersole Gary L. 2003: 113) It is this didactic function that we find at the core of the comparative cultural discourse of Foss’s captivity narrative. Through his narrative, Foss invites the American reader of early independent America to “set a just value on their own conditions and to prize their own good”. Thus when it

comes down to the final justification for making public his experiences in Algiers, it boils down to an ostensive self-definition by negation. In simple terms, for Foss early independent America was everything that Algiers (Read the Orient.) then was not.

Let me qualify further the point above by returning to Cotton Mather's *The Glory of Goodness*. A cursory reading of this captivity narrative reveals that Mather, through a double comparison and contrast (Puritan captives versus Muslims and Puritan captives versus Other Christian captives) inscribed his country and fellow countrymen not simply as Christian, but very specifically as Puritan. For Mather, the religious discipline of the Puritan captives contrasts markedly with what he described as "Mahometism" and the "laxity" of other Christian captives. Playing down the fact that the release of the Puritan captives was negotiated by King William and Queen Mary, Mather affirms that their deliverance was ultimately due to the powerful community spirit at home: "the *Cry of PRAYER* [in New England] made a Noise that reach'd up to heaven [and caused] the *arm of the Lord* [to be] *awakened* for the deliverance of these our Sons"(1703:67) In the conclusion to his captivity narrative, Mather urged the returned captives to sing the praises of God on "all fit occasions [...] in *Speaking*, but also in *Writing*" of their captivity. Above all he urged the returned captives to take benefit of hindsight and to see to it that they record the blessings of living in New England: "God Returned you to the Blessings of His day, and of His House, whereof you were deprived, when the Filthy Disciples of *Mahomet* were Lording it over you: You should now make a better use of Them than ever you did". (Ibid.69) This quote captures the spirit and established distinctions behind the captivity that Foss wrote nearly a century later. Following Rowson, Foss closes his account with the celebration of his country whose virtuous character earned the admiration of even the "barbarians" who had made them prisoners for eleven years:

The Republican government of the United States have set an example of humanity to all the governments of the world. --- Our relief was admiration to merciless barbarians. They viewed the caractere [Sic.] of Americans from this time in the most exalted light. They exclaimed, that “Though we were slaves, we were gentlemen;” that “the American people must be the best in the world to be so humane and generous to their countrymen in slavery.” (Quoted from Baepler Paul, 1999:95)

Overall, Foss was not very “generous” in the praise that he addressed to his country if we take into account the opprobrious remarks that he made about Algiers. But then this stands to the discursive logic of the Barbary captivity narrative as a genre. The latter cannot do otherwise since it stands as a foil to the discourse on the merits of the newly established United States government. Its purpose is to justify and legitimate the new polity by setting comparison between the law and order that it established across the nation with the chaos and disorder that supposedly prevailed in the oriental city of Algiers. Very often the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were said to be inspired from the democratic ideas defended by Montesquieu in *The Spirit of Laws*. This modest research allows me to claim that captivity narratives like that of Foss and Rowson are oriental supplements smacking of the oriental discourse developed in the same *Spirit of Laws* by Montesquieu. As supplements they “consolidated” (the word is Said’s) the identity of the new nation not by “enumerating” (the word is Foucault’s) the laws and virtues of the new nation as the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence did, but by establishing differences between what are envisioned as the despotic and chaotic regimes of the North African Regency (*Odjak*) of Algiers and the democratic regime at home in quest of legitimacy for a stronger central government.

There is another side to this argument that I have to clear up before I conclude. This is related to the fact that orientalism

in the Barbary captivity narratives is a double-edged sword, a sword that cuts in two distinct but related ways. By this I mean that it was not uncommon in early post-colonial America for writers to use the oriental discourse to unsettle their ideological adversaries at home or in Europe while remaining uncompromising towards the oriental Other out there on the North Africa coast. Furthermore, the oriental discourse in the Barbary captivity narratives reveals that the “Barbaresques” are as much captives to their ideological systems as the Americans they held in captivity, hence their need for a similar liberation. I have already illustrated these points with reference to Rowson’s play. Here, I shall give just a brief illustration from Benjamin Franklin’s last printed letter to the *Federal Gazette* signed *Historicus* (1790) to reinforce them. Wearing the mantle of a fictitious *Sidi Mehemet Ibrahim* a member of the *Divan of Algiers*, Franklin explains in the same manner as the American defenders of the slave system why “slavery” on “Barbary shore” must not be abolished. The Oriental turn that Franklin gave to his anti-slavery argument was meant to discredit American pro-slavery leaders by putting them on a par with the “Orientals” who were then retaining their fellow citizens in bondage.

Some final reflections are in order. This reading of a sample of Indian and Barbary captivity narratives from early colonial and early post-colonial America shows that they have their basis in Puritan ontology and eschatology. Having waned in the colonial period, the Barbary captivity narrative resurfaced in the early independence period, and together with its literary kith and kin the Indian captivity narratives were used to justify and legitimate the new political order. In these captivities, the tensions between classes, political rivals and gender problems are voiced, but they are subsumed and reconciled in the conflicts with Indians in the frontier and “Orientals” on the North African sea coast. In other words, while dramatising the political or moral failings of one party or another, the captivity narratives

projected class, gender and political wars outward into racial war on the frontier and the South Mediterranean shore. In the process of transforming the episodes of this racial war into testing grounds for character building, moral vindication and regeneration through often divinely inspired violence, they fabricated heroes like Daniel Boone and John Foss at the moment when the nation was most in need of models of republican citizens. On the debit side, these captivity narratives provided a basis for a nascent imperialism whose dynamics of domination with reference to what is called the Orient came into full play during the First and the Second Gulf Wars conceived as part and parcel of “the war on terror” and “the axis of evil”.

Naturally, the Barbary captivity narrative was enlisted again in the “struggle for freedom” and it answered the call in the shape of Rick Bragg’s *I Am a Soldier, Too: The Jessica Lynch Story* (2003). The historical career of the captivity narrative (Indian and Barbary) landed it at last in Iraq (the Orient) where it really belonged. The way that Rowlandson’s Indian captivity narrative, Rowsan’s Barbary captivity narrative, and the Jessica Lynch story echo each other through time and space allows me to make the following claims with regard to the main theses that Said makes about orientalism. As a Manichean style of thought, American orientalism is not the historical appendage of British orientalism that Said makes of it in his book. While I agree with him that the end of the eighteenth of the century saw the birth of orientalism in his third sense of the word, it has also be observed that the Barbary captivity narratives provided much of the impetus behind both the Tripolitan Wars and Lord Exmouth’s bombardment and destruction of Algiers in 1816. Even at that time, the Puritan apocalyptic calendar seems to have had so much hold on the English for a Lord Exmouth (Thomas Pellow) to write that he was proud of being “one of the humble instruments in the hands of divine providence” for destroying the city of Algiers. (Quoted from Milton Giles, 2005) It follows that Barbary captivity narratives from early independent America marked that very specific

moment at the end of the eighteenth century, which Said sets as the start for the invention of the “Orient” and “Orientalism” in Britain. Admittedly, as Said writes, American orientalism wasn’t officially opened until the end of World War that brought out a shift in the balance of power among the imperial nations. But until then authors as various as Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Mark Twain and Walt Whitman in the nineteenth century, and Hollywood filmmakers in the first half of twentieth century had exercised their individual talent within the British oriental tradition that they used on occasion as a rhetorical argument against the “old Europe” in general and Britain in particular.

Notes and references

Baepler Paul, “Introduction,” in Baepler Paul, ed., *White Slaves, African Masters*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999.

Ebersole Gary L., *Captured by Texts: Puritan to Postmodern Images of Indian Captivity*, Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2003.

Fisher Sir Godfrey, *Barbary Legend: War, Trade and Piracy in North Africa 1415-1830*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957.

Foss John D., (1798) “A Journal of the Captivity and Sufferings of John Foss,” in Paul Baepler, ed., *White Slaves, African Masters*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999.

Gee Joshua (1680) *Narrative of Joshua Gee of Boston, Mass., While he was Captive in Algiers of the Barbary Pirates*, Hartford: Wadsworth Atheneum, 1943.

Milton Giles, *White Gold: The Extraordinary Story of Thomas Pellow and North Africa’s One Million European Slaves*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2005.

Jefferson Thomas, “Letter to John Adams, Paris, July 11, 1786,” in Albert Ellery Bergh, ed. *The Writings of Thomas*

Jefferson, Vol.5, The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1904.

Rowson Susanna Haswell (1794), *Slaves in Algiers, or A Struggle for Freedom: A Play Interspersed with Songs* eds., Jennifer Margulis and Karen M. Poremski, Acton, Mass., 2000.

Said Edward (1978), *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, London: Penguin, 1991.

Sari J. Nasir, *The Arabs and the English*, London: Longman, 1976. Speaking of the William Lithgow's representation of the Arabs in his travelogue *A Most Delectable and True Discourse of a Painful Peregrination* (1614), Sari writes that "Lithgow's account of the Arabs of what the first American settlers reported of the Red Indians. In one story the Arabs were said to use "bows and arrows" against their foes. The story in Lithgow's words was as follows: "Scarcely were we well advanced in our way, till we were beset with more three hundred Arabs, who sent us from shrubby heights an unexpected shower of arrows." (p.27)

Slotkin Richard, (1885) *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialisation 1800-1890*, New York: Simon and Schuster Inc., 1998.

Slotkin Richard, (1885) *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialisation 1800-1890*, New York: Simon and Schuster Inc., 1998.