

Borders, Bodies, and Writing: American Barbary Coast Captivity Narratives, 1816-1819¹

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Abstract: Travel and captivity are always written on the body. The body is a border, like that of the nation state or the society which can be a barrier but also a threshold. This paper will argue that works of captivity, enslavement, and racial difference in the United States during the period 1816-1818 are polemically structured around distinctions written on the body of captivities as if they embody the borders of a national community. The three narratives discussed are by Robert Adams, Judah Paddock, and William Riley. Each of these narratives sold well on both sides of the Atlantic and were published in a number of different formats including pamphlets, illustrated well-bound editions, children's versions, as well as abridged and magazine editions. In the second section of the paper, I will establish the shared patterns these texts follow and then turn to their significant differences in focus. The patterns established in these three texts give a way to evaluate how each writer works within stable binary categories of difference while moving, at certain times to test and qualify those categories, by suggesting that neither the ideologies of savagery or slavery adequately maintain shifting categories of difference between Europeans and Others in West Africa or Morocco.

Keywords: Barbary Coast narratives—borders—nationalism—body—captivity narrative—exploration—race—American nationalism—colonialism

1 The research and writing of this paper was done at the Rothermere American Institute, Oxford University. Portions of the paper were given at three conferences: The Nordic Association of English Studies, Bergen Norway, 2007, The European Association for Borderlands Studies in Kirkenes Norway, 2008, and The Norwegian Association of American Studies in Bergen, Norway 2009. I also wish to thank the constructive comments and suggestions I received from my research colleagues in the Border Aesthetics Project at the University of Tromsø and the two anonymous reviewers for *American Studies in Scandinavia*.

This essay will argue that for Britain and America at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, between 1812 and 1815, there were “patterns of convergence” and separation as each nation traversed new thresholds of decision that transformed the social and intellectual worlds of the revolutionary 1770s and 1790s into new nations of imagined community (Davis, 1-35; Chandler, 441-480). The period is central to an expanding national/cultural/economic formulation of national territorialities. Some texts of the period present a central character born into a space of, in Raymond Williams’ (1983) useful phrase, “place-able bonding: into a set of relationships, which are typically settled in a place” (180). Characters have an identity constructed from shared linguistic, cultural, political, and social values to which the characters assent, but which are contested through depictions of the crossing of borders, boundaries, and frontiers. If we expand beyond this period and examine the period 1816-1819, then we can see immense shifts in nation and its narration brought on by an enlarged sense of physical geography, as well as an erosion of a spatially bounded identification of place and culture (Morretti; Trumpener; Davis). This is not to say that during this period maps, treaties, legal statutes and even ideological formations did not foreground cultures and nations as discrete objects occupying discrete spaces and places. However, such formal spatial definitions cannot hide patterns of shifting transatlantic emigration from 1812 to 1820; international treaties that reconstituted the European and North American continents; expanding statehood in America, with a correspondent redefinition of slave states and free states; and England’s expanding internal and external empire.

What I am suggesting is that the fiction of cultures and nations being discrete object-like phenomena occupying distinct spaces and “progressing” over chronological time, comes intermittently into question during this period. First, after the transatlantic and transnational European conflict of 1800-1815, social and cultural movements focused on ideological transformation had begun to be situated across interconnected spaces, such as movements for the abolition of slavery; demands for “liberty, equality and fraternity” in a number of colonies and former colonies; the agitation for voting rights and economic freedoms; attempts to create new colonies by a number of European countries; to the desire to find the illusive “Northwest Passage.” Secondly, while there was the attempt to map imagined communities of ethnicity, race, or language onto places such as homelands, extended families (clans), and landscapes, there was a countervailing movement to recognize those spaces as hierarchically interconnected and not

autonomous. There was a shift from bounded spatially divided nation states to more indistinct spaces and therefore places.

Establishing borders and mapping territories, both new and old, was central during this period in Europe, the colonial worlds outside Europe, and in the Americas. This paper will focus on border crossing narratives by using examples from texts published between 1814 and 1819 on both sides of the Atlantic, where there was a convergence of interest in fictional and factual narratives of captivity and shipwreck on the Barbary Coast of Africa and harrowing travelers' tales of the exploration of the sources of the Niger River and the search for Timbuktu. My focus will be on the ways in which these border crossing narratives write national and racial, cultural and religious, even legal borders on the body of narrators and central characters in these texts.

Much recent criticism and many theoretical formulations of the transatlantic Barbary Coast captivity narrative have detailed how discourses of race, nationalism, exploration, colonialism and natural history helped to shape the genre.² Literary historians have also investigated how this narrative form often responded to a common set of cultural imperatives on both sides of the Atlantic, especially those focused upon Abolitionist discourses of power and freedom. Like the captivity narrative itself, the Barbary Coast narrative is a conversation between documentation and creation—a tension between certifying and registering events in a chronological order of development, and the creative embellishment of events and experiences. Such tensions allow these texts to take on representative textures. Additionally, recent historians of American popular culture and the history of British colonialism have found that the transatlantic template of the Barbary Coast narrative can open up new perspectives on both British and American colonial expansion in specific periods from the seventeenth to the nineteenth

2 The Barbary Coast captive narrative was a popular genre in European culture from Cervantes's "El Cautivo" in *Don Quixote* to Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio*, evoking images of Christian men enslaved and Christian women forced into the Pasha's harem. It had a long history in American literary culture from references in Cotton Mather's sermon "The Glory of Goodness" (1703) to its use during the period of greatest contact between America and the Barbary States and Morocco between 1785 and 1820. Over 700 Americans were taken hostage during those few years, and in the popular literature of the day it was a source of fascination. See two excellent articles by Paul Baepler: his introduction to *White Slaves, African Masters* and his 2004 article; also Timothy Marr and a number of individual studies mentioned throughout this paper.

centuries (Colley, *Captives*).³ Another group has found that these narratives seek to redraw the map of Africa in a search for new and revitalized spaces for exploration, colonial commercial expansion, and missionary revitalization.

As Philip Gould and Jennifer Brezina have argued, many of the Barbary Coast narratives were also valuable cultural commodities during this period (Gould 86-121; Brezina 201-19). For publishers in both Britain and America there was an appetite for consuming Africa, whether in travel narratives, captivity narratives, and novels (Nussbaum 74).⁴ The texts worked to a formula, offering their readers the opportunity to merge a tale of physical suffering and deprivation in the desert with an allegory of national self-creation and community in the figure of the narrator. Events were embedded in recognizable narrative traditions that combined autobiography and travelogue in a progressive/linear model of personal suffering and eventual salvation through the intervention of a kind "Consul" who paid the ransom. The plot followed a formula: the narrator is taken captive due either to shipwreck or piracy; the narrator is stripped of his clothing and personal possessions; is forced to suffer hunger, thirst, and uncertainty; the experience of the captivity is then visible on the narrator's body, with a concomitant darkening of the skin; there is a loss of language and community; there is the threat of conversion to Islam; descriptions of travel in the desert; news of the possibility of ransom; melodramatic descriptions of physiological disorientation while waiting for offers of ransom; and the introduction in the last half of the story of an angelic American/British consul who "rescues" the captives by personal kindness, culminating in the payment of a ransom. The British or American consul is an embodiment of "nation-ness" (Benedict Anderson) and is someone who can sensitively imagine the captive's suffering because of its visibility on his/her body. Sentiment, however, is mixed with sense as the Consul attempts to confirm the captive's story by constructing a set of questions that authenticate the experience (Baepler *White Masters*; Baepler "Barbary Captivity"; Benhayoun; Brezina; and Snader).

3 I will use Colley's definition of captivity narratives: "Captivity narratives ... offer access to people suddenly reduced to a state of liminality, taken away from their normal position in life, stripped of customary marks of status and identity, and removed in many cases from the reinforcement of their own kind. So positioned, men and women could be led to re-examine issues of national, religious and racial belonging, who and what they were, and how far this mattered" (Colley, "Going Native" 187).

4 In her book, *Torrid Zones: maternity, sexuality, and empire in eighteenth-century English narratives*, Felicity Nussbaum details a very real appetite in Europe for consuming Africa: its goods, its riches, and its human commodities, slaves (74-75).

Within the Barbary narrative, as we shall see, the narrator's descriptions of his captors embody a complex attitude to Africans, and to the distinctions between "Negro tribesmen," "Moorish" traders, and other "Islamic peoples." Usually this complexity comes in the negotiation of difference within sets of Orientalist rhetoric as the captive moves from place to place with his captors, or as he or she is traded or sold to different groups (Said). In each case, the captive is forced into the recognition and crossing of symbolic and epistemological boundaries. Partly it is an age-old story: the experience of leaving home and of entering, in many cases by force, a different or new domestic, national, religious community creating a split world of past memories and present dislocation. These narratives are not so different from other captivity narratives that document real or imagined loss of control of the boundaries that separate the European/American subject from the Other or those that present experiences of violence threatened or enacted on the narrator's body.

What I am arguing is that the liminal condition of captivity is placed in a liminal space: the fusing of the Maghreb, the Barbary Coast and the North Atlantic coast of Africa. This can be explained, in Timothy Marr's useful phrase, because of the "changing coordinates of the cartographical imagination" and religious education at the time (Marr 27). Ann Thomson states this quite clearly: Barbary "was part of the known world but irremediably alien, part of both African, the Mediterranean and the Islamic worlds" (41, 42-63). A known world that in a not-so-distant past had been part of the Roman Empire and part of Christendom, though this historical memory was counterbalanced by the realization that the area was also the western outpost of the Ottoman Empire in the regencies of Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli, and home to a number of indigenous and historically-defined groups that moved freely in a large geographical area of unknown dimensions in the interior of the region. The Kingdom of Morocco and the three regencies controlled the coastline of the Mediterranean. Geographically it was on the edge of the sea separating Europe and Africa, and Europe and the Ottoman Empire. These spaces mark separation and connection geographically, but perhaps more importantly historically, for "the Maghreb" suggested a connection with Islam and that the area was integral to the African continent and the Mediterranean. Within the imagination of Europe and of America it was also the site of Timbuktu and Carthage, fabled trading centers (Kriz 129-130; Marr 26-34; Thomson 51, 123-142). In the words of an early 19th century writer: "more books are written on the Barbary than on any other

country, and yet there is not a country with which we are so little acquainted" (Jackson 1811, x). Despite the voyages of Labat (1725), Moore (1738), Hornemann (1797), and Park (1799 and 1805) not much was known about Northwest Africa and very few attempts to explore the area had been successful (Nussbaum 75; and Fulford, Lee, and Kitson 92, 287). It became a place often created from cultural and ideological memory. In both Britain and Europe, the potent mixture of perceived political tyranny and "anti-christian darkness" seemed to confirm the "barbarity" of the entire region.

In Britain and America this imaginary geography had been created in exploration narratives, novels, and plays, but it was the captivity narrative that set one form of liminality—captivity—within the geographical liminality of the space of an Other. On the captive British or American body the violence of the contact zone is inscribed and can be read. The body becomes violated, tortured, mutilated and marked. The captive body is a space and a commodity of exchange, taken for ransom and to work (see Benhayoun, Colley *Captives*, Rojas, and Snader). This has been further refined by Michelle Burnham in *Captivity & Sentiment: Cultural Exchange in American Literature, 1682-1861* in which she usefully argues that the genre transports the narrators "to interstitial zones of contact, where dominant values, standards, and modes of representation fail, falter, or are brought to crisis. As a result, these captive figures transgress conventions that they continue to value and affirm even as—or especially as—they fail to conform to them. To this extent, narratives and novels of captivity consistently betray their own motives and undercut their own postures of nationalism and ethnocentrism ..." (170). While her assertion is applied to American captivity narratives of an earlier period, I think it is especially useful to examine some of the ways this description might apply to Barbary Coast narratives published in both Britain and America at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Narrative plausibility depends upon the personal authority of the narrator in these texts and each writer puts the conventions of the genre to slightly different uses depending upon their desire to embed collective identities within their text. Each text also draws a boundary at the beginning of the communicative act to encompass and represent events, actions in a socialized political-geographic space. This space is then embodied in the captain and crew until the day of their captivity by either piracy or shipwreck. And this action causes the destabilization of border formations within the narrative conventions of the captivity narrative opening a new site of identity formation enacted on the body.

Edward Said's seminal study, *Orientalism*, suggested a way to explore this process within travel literature in the later 19th and 20th centuries. I will build on previous critical commentaries to argue that they share a unique interconnected publication and ideological history: in fact they might be considered as one narrative "story" with theme and variations. They form a transatlantic conversation, demonstrating complex negotiations employing the use of the discourses of captivity; place and space in which the body was the focus of configurations of the nation; and of performative models of leadership and a revitalized masculinity.

I

First I think that the transatlantic intersections of the three texts need detailing. In 1816 in London, *The Narrative of Robert Adams, A Sailor ship wrecked on the West Coast of Africa* was published by John Murray; in 1817 John Murray published William Riley's *An Authentic Narrative of the loss of the American Brig Commerce, wrecked on the western coast of Africa, in the month of August, 1815*; in 1818 Longman, Hurst, and Rees published Judah Paddock's *Narrative of the shipwreck of the ship Oswego, on the Coast of South Barbary, and of the Sufferings of the Master and the Crew while in Bondage among the Arabs*.⁵ The Riley and Paddock texts were first published in America, while the Adams text was published in America in 1817. All three texts were written by American seamen from the Hudson Valley who had been shipwrecked, held captive by various groups on the north Atlantic Coast of Africa, then enslaved and transported across the sections of the Sahara, and brought to be ransomed by British or American consuls in one of the Barbary regencies or the Kingdom of Morocco.⁶ Reviewers in Britain stressed how these texts might have geographic and ethnographic value as evidence of the source and course of the Niger River

5 As a number of critics have pointed out, James Riley's narrative forms the connecting link between the Puritan captivity narrative, the American slave narrative and the Barbary Coast narrative. Riley's book, which is the main focus of this paper, went through 25 editions before the Civil War, and a children's edition in 8 printings. Riley paid for the publication of a member of his crew Archibald Robbins's *Journal*, which had 31 printings by 1851, and also paid for the printing of Judah Paddock's *Narrative*, which I discuss here. Paddock's text was also very popular, with three printings in its first year of publication. I have used the slightly condensed reprint of the Riley text, *Sufferings in Africa*, with an introduction by Dean King. All citations of the Riley text are to this edition.

6 In 1816, a third edition of a novel of Barbary captivity by Royall Tyler, *The Algerine Captive* (1796, reprinted in London in 1802) was published in Hartford, Connecticut. This too plays American and Algerian, Christian and Muslim, off against each other.

or the search for Timbuktu (See Barrow's *Quarterly Review* articles and Jared Sparks' reviews cited in *The Narrative of Robert Adams, Critical Edition*, 147-182). American reviewers stressed the chapters in the Riley and Paddock texts on the need for the Abolition of the slave trade, while British reviews questioned Riley's veracity and American reviewers questioned Adams' credibility. The narratives have a great many things in common, from the heroic consul who raises the ransom and organizes the captives' release, to publishers and formatting, to detailed appendices detailing the authentication of the narrator and the narration. The Riley and Paddock narratives are to be found also in various abridged versions appearing throughout the 19th century (Allison, 207-25). Illustrated versions of the Adams text appeared in America, and often the Riley and Paddock texts were published together.

Paul Giles has demonstrated that "trade and travel" are important elements of the early transatlantic novel, and I would argue that popular narratives fall into this pattern as well. Additionally, Timothy Marr has argued, in his influential study *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism*, that captivity narratives set on the Barbary Coast instructed Americans in patterns of heroic resistance to tyranny and despotism, embodied in the Turk or Mussulmen, but they also celebrated the survival of the captives' democratic "voice, a symbol of the power of a nation that refused to allow its sailors to languish in suffering enslavement" (20-3). He also makes the important point that most of these texts, all published in a short period, sought to intervene in American and European foreign policy. The specter of oriental despotism was a set against a community of values and heroism and a nation capable of furthering its own interests.

Paul Baepler has brought together a number of additional Barbary captive narratives in his excellent collection, *White Slaves, African Masters* (1999) which have an uncanny intertextual relationship with the three narratives I will focus on. Additionally, a number of critics have used these individual captivity narratives to help define a discourse of race (Melish), or nation (Brezina), or American foreign policy in the Mediterranean. Other historians and literary critics have used these narratives to analyze Orientalist constructions of Moors, Arabs, Bedouins, and Berbers. Recently, a historian of British and American Abolitionist movements have used discourses of the Barbary Coast to develop a critique of the complex tropes of enslavement, despotism, and the power of Christian missionary colonialism (Gould 86-120). I have used some of these studies, but I think these three

texts need to be examined more carefully for their structural continuities, their uses of the body itself as a space for writing and the erotic presentations of suffering and racial difference in the period, and also the fascinating way in which these texts play a self-conscious role in the formulation of transatlantic foreign policy.

In these three narratives, each narrator has crossed a border, either due to shipwreck or to the actions of Barbary corsairs, a border marked by what has been taken away from them (their "freedom," clothing, food and drink, community, etc.), and how the effects of such a crossing can be read on their bodies: through changes in skin color, physical suffering, "stupor," or slurred speech. First, in each of these captivity narratives, the body of the individuals is changed by their contact with the foreign climate, customs, peoples, and landscape. Their bodies, due to the dislocations and relocations of captivity, are changed and reformulated, turning skin into an opaque mark of difference. While "change is being figured on the body and as body" (Boehmer 269), the skin is read as a significant border, marking race: "The skin itself stands metonymically for the whole human being" (Benthien 17). The skin is a place of encounter and a field of "investigation," rather than just division: it is in Pratt's sense a "contact zone." Environmental explanations of difference might be tested against hypothetical ones that had defined differences as innate and fixed. We can read "cases" in which there is a turning away from environmental explanations to offer new physical proofs of essential and permanent racial difference. These captivity narratives were not "bound by empirical protocols which demanded rigorous practices of description and notation" (Laesk 15), but rather they recycled existing tropes from sentimental fiction, travel and exploration narratives, and the rhetoric of suffering and redemption to tell a different story.

Joanne Pope Melish has effectively analyzed the presentation of race and changing skin color during this period in the popular literature of American "medical and scientific magazine culture" and in a number of Barbary Coast narratives. The physical bodies of mulattos and light-skinned African Americans provided a place where the intersection of the body, skin, and a new investigative technology could be represented. In her first examples, she uses magazines such as *The Monthly Magazine*, *American Review*, or *The Medical Repository* to present what was called "the mystery of how black skin turned white for no apparent reason," requiring investigation by "doctors, scientific investigators, and publishers" (Melish 223-236). The public fascination, especially in the Northern press, with physical anomalies in

skin color and in the black body itself has been explained by the practice of seeking systematic correspondences between the external characteristics or markings on the skin, and innate truths about a group of people's nature and condition that were a product of changing relationships with free people of color. During this period, American philosophers and European naturalists sought to classify races, usually using a binary structure of white and black and then creating subgroups based upon differences in culture and climate. But well-known Americans such as Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Rush, and Charles Wilson Peale radically threw such categories into question when they published case studies of African albinism. Additionally, there were "[a]ccounts of remarkable alteration of color in negro women" during the period and accounts of "a white negro" whose body and skin had been "explored" by a group of leading physicians. The most famous case in the 1790s was Henry Moss, who presented himself for "public" examination by a set of politicians, scientists, and philanthropists. The reports in the press of these "mappings" of Moss's body almost all involve penetration, by "close scrutiny" or touch. Melish argues that they are a form of the policing of the black body in the Northern states and indicate how a category of "free people of color appeared as both a symptom and a catalyst of social change and disorder" (223). The examinations reveal an attitude toward their subjects as captive possessions: curiosities or "oddities" in which their changes in skin color are an aberration. But these reports are complicated by the intervention of a framing rhetoric of "authority" where a doctor or civic leader interprets, investigates, and records the presentation of evidence.

Melish goes on to compare the reception and recording of this skin change to its imaginative presentation in Barbary Coast narratives in America from 1816-1818. I would like to expand on her work to suggest another way of reading this material. Each narrative focuses on the enslavement of white captains and their crews by North African pirates in the Barbary States. The periodic seizure of American and British vessels by Barbary corsairs, their enslavement, sometimes for as long as eight years, and their eventual ransom had reached a crisis after the War of 1812, when American vessels no longer had the protection of the British navy and the Barbary corsairs had become more active. In each text, the men are captured on the coast, stripped of their clothing, marched inland with little food or water, forced to do hard physical labor or tend the animals, and keep away from their captors and fellow crew members. The first chapters of these texts always seek to trace the captives' sufferings on their bodies—Riley and Paddock "shed"

their white skins—finding themselves “blackened” by the sun, while their skin becomes leathery, hardened, caked with sand. They are, as their captors, “tawny, dusky, swarthy skinned,” but even when reduced to a skeletal frame by the cruel behavior of their captors, the location of their difference is situated deep within their body and thus their essence can be preserved and is “veiled” by their skin. Riley’s and Paddock’s view of their own skin as a covering for an essential self is not, however, the structuring element of the Adams narrative. For Riley and Paddock, identity is found and revealed by studying the tracings on their body and in writing their narratives. But for Adams, who could not read or write, his book begins with a process of negotiation involving a continual exchange of discursive performances in which the created speaker/author Robert Adams, his editors, and his questioners produce “a mutual and mutable” recognition within representational discourses. The terms of cultural engagement, “whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively” at a space at the beginning of the text (Bhabha 2-5). It is both a place of encounter and a site of the attempted authentication of difference in which “anxieties of authenticity” (Burnham 172) are acted out.

Let me now use a specific example from the first part of the Riley narrative, *An Authentic Narrative of the American Brig Commerce*, and then one from the Adams text. Central to the Barbary captivity narrative, as I suggested earlier, is the binary opposition between dark-skinned Arabs, “merciless beings in human forms,” and the white-skinned Christian slaves. Their captivity is remembered as a process of violation of the borders of their body—they are first “stripped naked to the skin” (54), and then marched into the desert. By being stripped of their clothing, these captives lose a sense of identity and community, and are denied a boundary between themselves and their harsh surroundings. The captain and crew are, in Riley’s words, “stripped, skinned alive and mangled” (77). However, they never lose a sense that their white skin is a signifier of their difference from their captors. Of course, for their “Moorish captors,” stripping captives and denying them food and water was a way to humiliate, disorientate, and keep control of them in the desert. Riley and his crew then begin to change color, gaining “another skin”: their “skin is burnt away” as they become “skinless skeletons.” Riley uses the trope of shedding his white skin for darker skin, “like a snake” (Riley 239). In fact, he wonders if his whiteness may be only skin deep (241, 244-5). To be “skinless” with a loss of social and cultural boundaries is, as Jennifer Brezina insightfully states, a way of “describing

the literal manifestation of his loss of white privilege in the text" (208). I would add that his nakedness, his being "skinned alive" is a physical manifestation of fractured subjectivity and alienation.

Riley's Arab captors "laugh at him and his discomfort," confirming his assumption about their cruelty. He describes his first captor as having a complexion "between that of an American Indian and a negro (*sic!*)" (20), but as Riley travels he comes to make careful distinctions about his captors. His own assumptions about skin color and cruelty are brought into question throughout the later sections of the text (see descriptions of Sidi Hamet and other "Negroes and Arabs" 71, 193, 209).

A group of recent American critics of the Riley text have suggested that, at least in the first part of the narrative, there is a movement away from stable hierarchies of race and color to pay close attention to skin as signifying an unstable personal identity. "Might the markings of enslavement be mutable? ... Could enslavement transform whites into a servile people, as dependent and instrumental as black slaves? If so, physical characteristics might not be a reliable indicator of 'aptitude,' so to speak, for enslavement—or entitlement or citizenship" (Melish 224). This calls attention to the body as a site of racial/national character and to skin as a metonymic border. In the examples used by Melish from the American popular press and the ones I have focused on above, bodies "establish paradigms of difference that were written, as natural signs, all over the skin and deep in the bone" (Fulford, Lee, and Kitson 147). But I think the most important aspect of the Barbary Coast captivity narrative is that these men and their crews did not bring back to America or Britain any "facts" or specimens beyond their own narratives and their close scrutiny of changes in their own bodies. They were not trained "explorers" or "scientists," no matter how their texts might be used later as part of an archive of authentic "evidence" by groups such as The Merchant Traders to Africa or the African Association.

However, in the Robert Adams narrative published in 1816 we have a different sort of example. The narrator's racial and national instability is the first thing Mr. Dupuis, the British Consul, notices at his encounter with Adams in Africa:

The appearance, features and dress of this man upon his arrival at Mogador, so perfectly resembled those of an Arab, or rather of a Shilluh, his head being shaved, and his beard scanty and black, that I had difficulty at first in believing him to be a Christian. When I spoke to him in English, he answered me in a mixture of Arabic and broken English, and sometimes in Arabic only. At this early period I could not help remarking that his

pronunciation of Arabic resembled that of a Negro, but concluded that it was occasioned by his intercourse with Negro slaves.

Like most other Christians after a long captivity and severe treatment among the Arabs, he appeared upon his first arrival exceedingly stupid and insensible; and he scarcely spoke to any one: . . . (15).⁷

As Paul Baepler remarks, this comment displays “a fear that the boundary of identity is closely linked to language and that language acquisition—particularly under the duress of captivity—comes perilously close to cultural assimilation” (42). But it also introduces the uncertain ways that the narrator’s race is presented in the text. Adams’ “appearance, features and dress . . . so perfectly resembled those of an Arab, or rather of a Shilluh, . . . that [Dupuis] has difficulty at first believing him to be Christian”; he is mistaken for a Moor. Also, early in the text, Dupuis accounts for Adams’ “color” by a reference to his complex family history: “he was born up river of New York, where his father lived” while “his mother was a Mulatto, which circumstance his features and complexion seem to confirm” (17). In an aside, one editor states that Adams is a “very dark man, with short curly black hair” (47), while his Arab captors single him out as white (55, 60), and both his editors assert that he is the first “white man” to see Timbuktu. Later in the text, there is an imbrication of ethnicity and language when Dupuis asserts that Adams’ “pronunciation of Arabic was at all times indistinct, and often quite incorrect . . . (75), but Adams “did know something of Negro language” of Africa (91).

Africans find his appearance significantly variable as well. Dupuis asserts that the African tribes who had held him captive “had never seen a white man before.” Adams’s alterity is framed for these groups in categorical terms: Dupuis notes, for example, “I do not imagine that the curiosity of the Negroes can have been excited so much on account of Adams’s color, as because he was a Christian, and a Christian slave, which would naturally be to them a source of great astonishment.” In fact by one group of his captors in Africa he is called “a Christian who never prayed” (57). “Christian” was a coded word for white throughout the Barbary Coast captivity narratives, novels, and plays. The consul asserts that the Negroes of Africa must have

7 I am aware that Adams’s editor, Simon Cock, his hosts and interviewers, shape all the evidence presented in this narrative. This heavily mediated text is extremely important for interpreting the Barbary Coast narrative in a number of contexts during the period, 1800-1820.

seen, in caravans from the Barbary states, many Moors of a “complexion quite as light as that of Adams” (89). Thus it might be assumed that Adams is racially Creole (89; see also Baepler, 1999 25; C. H. Adams ix).

The body and speech of Adams are signs of inferiority requiring his “editors” intervention. They embed him in prefaces, footnotes, endnotes, maps, and commentary. For readers on both sides of the Atlantic, Adams’s alterity marks him as unreliable, outside the communities of evidential knowledge and experience to which the captivity narrator should conform. The critic David Johnston argues, “In spite of the rigorous impossibility of deciding who or what Adams might have been—outside, perhaps, his status as a curiosity, which is well documented—such exclusion signals the dominance of a notion of race exhausted from the very moment of its institutionalization” (363). Adams is clearly not the white man of moral courage, self-sacrifice, and immediately recognizable authority whom his amanuenses sought, and whom later generations of commentators on African exploration would venerate. And the Adams narrative raises another problem, since it suggests that “a disturbing hybridity haunts the colonial encounter, preventing it from ever ossifying into a settled binary and ensuring that the colonizer’s assumption of centrality and superiority is continually under threat” (Fulford, Lee, and Kitson, 26).

II

In each of the narratives I have discussed thus far, the action of being taken captive and the captives’ body are constructed as identity narratives. They depict an encounter in which national identity formations and socializations are formulated, negotiated, contested, and worked out both ideologically and within a particular genre. Bordering process are central to these meanings and forms of belonging that depend both on an imaginary political-geographic space and also upon the traditions of narrative being enacted by these writers. In the next section, I will examine the formulations of the body politic on the body of the captive demonstrating how the literary discourse of captivity was used to mediate forms of national identity. Much of this will come down to the complex ways in which these narratives sought to work out the authentication of difference within the geographic space of the Barbary Coast and the Northern states.

But this did not stop a systematic attempt to identify, especially in the Riley and Paddock narratives, the captive body with the nation. Writing in 1808, Johann Gottlieb Fichte argued that in order to unite a fragmented

country into a collective whole, the “external frontiers” of the state must become the “internal frontiers” of the citizen. Martin Bruckner has shown that this idea had a profound effect in the United States in the early 19th century, framing a discourse which united one “connected country with one united people” under the watchful eye of a divine Providence” (98-141). The skin is the borderline, at least metaphorically, which connects the exterior frontiers of the state with the internal being of the citizen, marking off, through ocular evidence, the difference between national and foreign territory. But there is a second formulation of how one might write the nation: it was to be found deep within the body where heredity alone provides a sense of identity. These writers may fantasize about a race uniquely white, stable, and American, but in the first decades of the 19th century these signs of difference become increasingly unstable, both within changing internal contexts in the popular literature of the Northern states and also when set outside the nation state on the Barbary Coast.

At the beginning of these captivity narratives, at least one of the orifices that connect the captive with the world is forced shut. Their tongues are “too parched” to speak or the very poor quality food and bad water leave them vomiting and disoriented (Riley 56-82). In all texts, the central act of cruelty is enacted upon the mouth of the captive. They are seldom allowed enough water, or food, and have to endure silence. They cannot make the “strange sounds” in “unutterable languages” which they hear around them; and while Riley can speak Spanish, which he thinks gives him access to Arabic, it only allows him to hear what he thinks are similar sounds.⁸

This contest over control of one’s senses was so well established by the time these writers were recounting their adventures that their helplessness, as written on their body, was a commonplace. For example, in the late seventeenth-century American Indian captivity narrative *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682), Rowlandson demonstrates control of her own body through detailing what she eats, how much and where, who can touch her food, and what she is willing to say to her captors. But the codes of possession and repossession are complex, as the narrator moves across the borders of her own body into assertions of control of spaces occupied by her body. The body of the captive becomes

8 This condition in colonial and post-colonial fiction, but not in the captivity narrative, has been carefully analysed by Elleke Boehmer (1993), and is brilliantly represented allegorically in J. M. Coetzee’s novel *Foe* (1986).

an arena in which social and racial demarcation and especially transcultural exchange take place. The desire for food seems uncontrollable but the choice of food and with whom one eats embody an attempt to take back lost control.

On two occasions early in his text, Riley frames his loss of control within a dream sequence (67-70, 179-80): "I thought I was naked and a slave, and dreamed over the principal incidents which had already actually passed" (67). The dream continues of a man "driven by Arabs with red hot spears pointed at me on every side," forcing him through a version of the Inferno. His travelling nightmare becomes a vision of his own wasted flesh and his "dry skeleton." Such a nightmare is followed by dreams of heavenly repose when he changes direction "towards the N.E." (67). The geographical distinctions in this text are strictly binary as Riley turns from the "south/east" to the north for his "salvation."⁹ He then descends into a deep valley with "green trees," where he finds a flowing brook of clear water to quench his thirst and revive his body. In this dream Riley finds himself again hurried through the landscape but this time under the watchful "All-seeing eye in the heavens." The dream ends with his ransom paid by a "young man dressed in the European and American manner" comforting him in "my own language" (68). He turns from dream to reality for a "Mr. Wilshire from the Kingdom of Morocco," was the British vice-consul at Mogador.

The captive lacks a detailed knowledge of his location and therefore uses an emblematic Biblical formula to identify the consul who "redeems" him. While this is formulaic, I think it is also a response to establishing a locatable personality within an unknown landscape. We should take into account Edward Said's early hypothesis that, in the Western attitude toward the Orient, the "relation between knowledge and geography" is always fundamentally imaginative (53). What happens in these scenes is that the captive defines himself as being in one place, but emphasizes that he belongs somewhere else. There is a split between the home/nation as somewhere else; in

9 For example, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in *The Philosophical Lectures*, repeated a commonplace that the "children of Ham seem by Providence to have been impelled to the south, and there as the inhabitants of Africa, to bear witness to us of that awful prophecy which Christianity, the universal redeemer, has been lately, to the undying glory of this nation, at once fulfilling, and healing the unhappy slaves that were to be servants of their elder brethren till that time when the servant should be as the master and the master as the servant before the eye of the common Lord" (cited by Fulford, Lee, and Kitson, 146).

a distant time and place, while the experience in the present is of alienation and dislocation. Also there are set pieces in each text in which the narrator dreams of being rescued by ships decked out in "the stars and stripes"; crewed by English speakers, asking him to participate in remembered national social rituals (see Riley 246-47; Adams 65-67; Paddock 263-65).

Just before Riley is to be ransomed, skin metaphors and tropes dominate his text—he narrates the visit of an "extraordinary chief" who holds each member of his captive crew up for inspection. This man is a color "something between that of a negro and an Arab" and is of a superior caste, but as he examines Clark, one of Riley's crew, he notices a "cross" and several other marks of Christian insignia that had been pricked in his skin with Indian ink—"in the manner of the Spanish and other sailors; the stain remained entire, though the skin had many times been changed, and now seemed tight over the bone" (177). The "extraordinary chief" sees the body of Clark as signifying difference. The positions of Clark and the Other have been reversed.

This also suggests that the captain and his crew have lost their figurative identity as a community and thus as a "nation" when they are captured. All these narratives begin with ships and shipping as a central focus: Adams, Riley and Paddock all claim to have come from the Hudson River area of New York, moving between state, national, and transnational boundaries within a stable space of command and control: a ship. Riley and Paddock both use the ship of state metaphor in the opening section of their narratives to create models of affiliation, but shipwreck and captivity destroy "the community" and its discipline. This is repeated a number of times in both the Riley and Paddock texts, when they comment on their responsibility for younger members of the crew, whom they see as surrogate "sons," or when they express fear that a member of their crew will "convert." Many in fact did "turn Turk" or "take the Turban" (Baeppler 42). As Joanne Pope Melish argues, in the Barbary captivity narrative and the fictions set there, "the imagery of descent, linking country and family appears everywhere" (231), reinforcing the fear that becoming the Other, "barbarous, monstrous" in the rhetoric of these texts, forces one outside community. In Hester Blum's interesting argument, these transatlantic narratives were also directed at an audience of seamen, appealing to their view of movement within existing systems of "multidimensional exchange between body, nation, and text," thus granting sailors "some way of participating in and responding to their own transnational labor and

literary histories" (138). And we should also note that these texts played upon a sailor's "home sickness": loss of family and familiar surroundings (Riley 1-20, 27-9; Paddock 1-25).

The important point here is that the Barbary Coast captivity narrative is anchored in dislocated subjects and transnational laborers whose anonymity and dehumanization have left them, in the words of Adams's patronizing editors, appearing to be "exceedingly stupid and insensible." A state overcome through the act of narrating their displacement, either in "writing" their story or in the case of Adams speaking it. The captive attempts to produce and acquire knowledge from within the realm of the Other while never letting this knowledge get into the hands of an Other. The narrators' experiences of improvisational interaction with their captors or transcultural attempts at communication open them up to the experience of being two minds in a single body. But there is no reason to think, nor do these narratives suggest, that such a situation of epistemological border crossing could become permanent.

Travel is experienced through the body and throughout these narratives the body of the individual travelling is changed by its contact with the foreign (Helmets and Mazzeo 270); in consequence, the signs of difference that mark the white and Anglo/European might be erased. With a change in skin color the white body might pass as brown or black, allowing the fantasy of "seeing without being seen" and to being able to enter the private parts of a culture—the harem, the home—without the gaze being returned. The captive might be able to enter into the authentic preserves of culture. It was a fantasy, of course, but one which suggested that these three writers, however briefly, could enter the world of the Other either by the darkening of sun-soaked skin, by selectively adopting native dress, or by being violently and physically enslaved by natives (for an analysis of this, see Helmets and Mazzeo 271-2).

I have argued above that the slave/captive might also transgress domestic spaces to critically evaluate the religious and cultural practices of their captors at first hand. They present Moors and Islamic traders as subject to ungoverned passions, such as avarice and pride and contrast this to the hierarchy, authority, and affiliation onboard ship. The captives sought to divide their texts into Manichean contenders that would enable them to preserve their own group's purity in the face of potential pollution (Tennenhouse 119-120). Equally important was the flip side: republican whiteness fostered in a community of ordered filiations, such as the ship or the nation

state, could persist despite temporary enslavement, degrading experience, and dislocation.¹⁰

For example, Riley states that “Moorish” cities and governments have been temporarily swept away “by superstition, fanaticism, and tyranny,” in which “the whole wealth of its once industrious and highly favored inhabitants—have driven the foreigner from their shores, and it seems as if the curse of Heaven had fallen on the whole land, for in spite of all the exertions of its cultivators and the fertility of the soil, severe droughts, and the ravages of the locusts, have frequently caused a famine in that country” (259-60).¹¹ There has been a decline of once “industrious” communities into “tyranny,” and when this is combined with the Abolitionist critique of slavery as acts of “barbarity” by societies that traded or ransomed slaves, the discourse structure becomes clear. The rhetorical process is one in which white Christian enslavement by Barbary corsairs and various tribesmen substitute for black African American enslavement, while slave labor and the slave body are also traded commodities, as is the body of the captive narrator in the Barbary Coast narrative (Gould 86-98).

Historians have pointed out that after the Napoleonic Wars in Europe and the War of 1812-14 in the United States, the paying of tribute and the ransoming of “Christians” and their ships and cargoes represented a crisis in commercial and legal relationships between Europe and America and the Ottoman Empire, and African peoples along the Northwest Atlantic coast. An act of “piracy” was a multivalent signifier: when James Madison became President in 1809, for example, he called Britain’s blockade of Europe “a system of monopoly and piracy” and regarded it as an outrage

10 In both the Riley and Paddock texts, one chapter is set up in dialogue form to discuss slavery in America by contrasting it to the slavery experienced by the captain and his crew members. Both writers identify themselves as abolitionists and when Riley’s text was abridged this chapter was seldom removed but the chapters describing the journey to Timbuktu were often dropped.

11 In April 1816 John Barrow, the second Secretary of the Admiralty, created the same pattern in an article in the *Quarterly Review* (139-183). Barrow finds in his review that all five travellers’ accounts describe a cultural and material decline of ancient Carthage: “That commerce, which raised them to a pitch of wealth and glory unequalled in their day, is now dwindled to a few armed vessels and rowboats employed solely in rapine and plunder, and that manly republican freedom, which so successfully resisted every attempt at the establishment of tyranny, is now sunk into the lowest and most abject state of slavery” (154). All the tropes are here—commercial virtues undercut by slavery, plunder, and piracy—but more important is the reading of this destruction of Carthage or the Moorish cultures of Morocco to “explain the subsequent enslavement and feminization of the native population and ultimately to rationalize certain forms of Western intervention,” which was central to American and later European foreign policy (Kirz, 124). Kirz does not attribute the anonymous review to Barrow here. See also Gould and Marr for further developments of this argument.

against legitimate shipping, such as that already existing “on the shores of Africa” (qtd. in Lambert 180); or it could be used by Sir William Sidney Smith in Britain to call for a “crusade” by the “Knight Liberators of the Christian Slaves in Africa” against the Barbary Coast regencies (see *Quarterly Review*, April 1816 140-41).

III

I have argued that the transatlantic popularity of these three narratives demonstrates a fascination with the exploration of Africa in the form of personal testimony; a feared racial loss of white privilege and identity within the economics of the Northern States due to African American migration North; and a changing view of national identity in which the ransoming of captives and acts of piracy were part of a newly developing international economy of transactional economic exchange. The dehumanization of the captive and the construction of barbarity are intertwined in this discourse. Paul Baepler makes a necessary and significant point: white captives were not born into captivity and stolen from their homeland, but mostly were willingly engaged in mercantile relationships in Africa. They often returned home to an “intact family and social structures into which they were born” (108) but that is not to say they were not marked by the trauma of the contact zone (see R. Richardson, 47-50). For example, in Riley’s narrative the point is made that mercantile relationships are at the center of how the African captor sees the narrator and in turn how the identity of the narrator is figured, if only for a brief amount of time as a slave (see Brezina; Baepler, *White Slaves*; or Pratt 87).

In each of these narratives the speaker or writer has to estimate their value based upon their identity as a “slave” and as soon-to-be-ransomed commodity. The narrators are reduced to a transactional identity. They have become “transportable property,” like the ship’s cargo. Each text provides a commentary on the role of men and goods as mercantile objects of speculative value for their captors.¹² These white Christian captives are on the one hand experiencing the slave trade first-hand, whilst on the other hand their position connects ransom with a speculative market and forms of capitalist circulation (Lambert 6, 37, 195). In recent cultural criticism of the discourses of identity in the Romantic Period, critics find the elaboration of an

12 “For *our* lives, they had no care whatever, except as considered of value to them in money” (Paddock, 216, see also 187; or Riley, 58, 115-124).

ideology that seeks to “produce relations, proportions, values,” challenging slavery through capital development (see Sonia Hofkosh in *Romanticism, Race and Imperial Culture, 1780-1834* for an articulation of this problematic). I would also suggest another reading of this discourse, in the Barbary Coast narrative, in which the act of ransom is a performance of “generosity” offered by the American nation (through the consul) to its citizens. Ransoming the captain and his crew out of slavery is an act of manhood in the “new republic.”

This is why Riley organizes his narrative around two symbolic cyclical structures. The first is the cycle of the rise and fall of civilizations, and the second is the personal providential cycle of suffering and redemption (also meaning the payment of ransom) common to Sentimental transatlantic fiction of the period (Tennenhouse 45-55). Riley returns to the transgressive actions of his captors on his body and by extension upon the body politic toward the end of his narrative. He wonders whether his “master” will find some one to “pay the money for my redemption”? If not, the condition of being “literally without skin” will become permanent, yet with the hope of “redemption” and an understanding of his own participation in “a providential plan,” Riley will gain a “new skin,” which “nearly covered his bones” (239). In the final pages Riley returns to this double cycle: the cycle of despair and hope based upon his own experience and then a rousing ending connected to larger cycles of regeneration and hope which could be offered to African and Islamic peoples in general (314-316).

As cultural historians of the period have pointed out, the ideological position that reads such decline in a cyclical view of history was a commonplace of the period and not restricted to captivity narratives; it can be found in William Turner’s paintings between 1814-1817 which were later exhibited at the Royal Academy in London, focusing on the Carthaginian Empire (see Kriz, or earlier accounts in Gibbon and Goldsmith). Another example was the immensely popular Volney’s *Ruins of Empire*, first published in 1787 (Leask 111-118). The formative myth here, of British and later of French colonizers in North Africa, was that Europe was engaged in the renewal and regeneration of the Roman imperial legacy, a lost Latin civilization that had been under attack from Islam from the early Middle Ages.

Riley and Paddock both focus on how North Africans have become enslaved to the Muslim religion, their own economic self-interest, and the despotic power of Ottoman Deys and Beys. Barrow’s reviews quoted above participated in the national and transnational rhetoric that sought to restore

“manly freedom” to the peoples of the region and to stop the spread of moral and political decline. But he carefully withheld his support for naval intervention, as advocated by Sir Sidney Smith, due to the large risks for the Royal Navy so soon after the war with France. His review is a panegyric to the need to explore and preserve ancient empires such as the Carthaginian and the Moorish civilization centered in Timbuktu, and most importantly to keep open trade routes in the Mediterranean and into Africa. The review proposes that developing better commercial relationships with all of Africa would bring a halt to “piracy” and “ransom” (*Quarterly Review*, 1816, 150-183).

The captivity narrative centered in the Barbary States and the Kingdom of Morocco had two different sets of constraining and enabling discourses focused on bordering and the body. First, that the body of the captive is a site to depict suffering, possible erasure or threatened changes in identity; and second, the use of the body for a series of metaphorical/allegorical equivalences with the body politic as the nation state. There is also a pattern of affiliation/disaffiliation in these narratives: onboard ship a well-disciplined community is established, and then disaffiliation is caused by harsh treatment and suffering, leading to the captives’ distrust of themselves within the community and their own power to embody providential benevolence. This is manifest in a possible loss of manliness, but later restored through the active intervention of the American or British consul. Enabling and constraining these three texts was also a lack of geographical and ethnographic knowledge about the regencies and kingdoms in the Maghreb both on the part of the audience as well as the captives themselves. But these texts, when combined with explorers journals and the mapping of the North West Coast of Africa, could bring a new benevolent colonialism that would end slavery, develop a scientific understanding of the area, and found new routes for commercial development in Africa.

These texts are, in Linda Colley’s assessment of the entire genre, “ambivalent documents” because of their “essential linkage between captivity on the one hand and the business of empire on the other” (“Going Native” 192). We have seen this in the important historical questioning of “scientific explanations” of the changing of skin color and identity to the recognition of environmental and transcultural performative identities written on the body. The necessity for the captive to collaborate, even enter, the captor’s culture was recognized while not necessarily accepted as legitimate by the readership, and it does complicate our understanding of the performativity

of identity during the period. While these texts might suggest that one might become the other, or call for the recognition of the other within one's self, there is also a pull to become what one already knew one was before the encounter. They might be then re-transformative: the experience of exposure to another culture, language, religion, geography, or domestic relationship is not necessarily transforming but re-establishes what one already was and knows (Johnson, 366). It is the border crossing that pulls backward toward an imagined desire to be at "home," which is an identity made up of a set of existing cultural affiliations. These texts are conflicting accounts of both fear and desire enacted on the body as a border within a historical period of dramatic social, political, and cultural change.

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