

**A White Slave in Africa:
A Re-reading of Captivity Narratives**

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Abstract

*The term 'captivity narratives' has mostly been associated with the whites who were abducted by the indigenous tribes of America and who told and re-told their experiences after their release by ransom or escape. However, they were never perceived as slaves despite their accounts of being maltreated and over-worked under inhumane circumstances. They were merely captives. On the other hand, the story of the white prisoners who were abducted by Barbary 'walking men' in North Africa were categorized in almost all historical and literary chronicles as 'slaves'. Over a period of almost three centuries, from the 17th till the 19th centuries, historian John Blasingame estimates that between half a million to one million white slaves were held in North Africa. The earliest literary account is that of the narrative of Abraham Browne, under the title *A Book of Remembrance of Gods Provydences towards me* in 1655.*

*This paper attempts to trace and research through the reading of three American texts the complicated master-slave relationship and the related issues of cultural exchange, the eternal cross-crescent conflict, the stereotypical demonization of the other as well as the racial and religious prejudices and biases in tandem with New World politics. The proposed texts are Captain James Riley's *An Authentic Narrative of the Loss of the Brig Commerce, wrecked on the coast of North Africa (1817)* and its *Sequel to Riley's Narrative* published a decade later from the personal possessions of Riley's son. The third text is Dean King's non-fiction book *Skeletons on the Zahara: A True Story of Survival* which is based mainly on the two autobiographical narratives where King embarks on a sponsored expedition to retrace Riley's journey across the Saharan desert.*

Keywords: Captivity Narratives, slave narratives, Critical Race Theory, Orientalism, Colonialist Discourse, Power Discourse.

Introduction

The acts of buying, selling, owning and very often tormenting slaves have been common practices since ancient times. The Babylonian code of Hammurabi dating back to the 18th century BC refers to slaves and their unequal status versus free men. Across history and to this day, slavery has been an ongoing inhumane vice practiced by humans, though the degree and type of slavery has definitely varied. The most notorious atrocity that history has intensively and extensively recorded is the trans-Atlantic slave trade. While studies have shown that this practice was one of the most shameful and tragic experiences in human history, it was preceded and succeeded by many more.

Until the beginning of the 20th century, slavery has almost always been associated with enslaving people of color. However, this study aims to read and analyze a different story of slavery. Ever since the 15th century and towards the first half of the 19th century varied history books, travelogues and literary texts have recorded multiple incidents of white Europeans and Americans who were taken as captives by Arabs specifically in the area which was called Barbary or what we know today as Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. Robert Davis in his book *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters* (2003) estimates the number of such captives to have reached approximately a million and two hundred and fifty thousand. The diverse experiences of incarceration produced numerous texts that described their tragic misfortunes. Although the aim of such writings at the time they were produced and disseminated was mostly to benefit financially by marketing their sordid stories, these accounts seem to offer their readers a different interpretation of slavery and servitude. This study will focus on an autobiographical narrative written by James Riley called *Sufferings in Africa*; one of the numerous texts that recorded this particular ‘historical event’. However, it will also refer to two other related texts with the objective of studying the socio-historical, cultural phenomenon of white slavery while relating it to its political context. Thus, the study will attempt to reveal the validity or invalidity of the historical underpinnings of these stories propagated by Western culture during the heyday of the imperial period.

In 1817, James Riley, an American seafarer, published his autobiographical narrative *Sufferings in Africa*. In this 620-page account, he records down to the minutest daily detail, his experience after being shipwrecked with his crew on the coast of Barbary and being captured and bought by Sidi Hamet, a Muslim Arab nomad in the Western desert of Morocco. The book’s long detailed title, which occupies the whole cover, as is often the case in similar accounts, reads as follows:

AN AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE OF THE LOSS OF THE AMERICAN BRIG COMMERCE WRECKED ON THE WESTERN COAST OF AFRICA, IN THE MONTH OF AUGUST, 1815. WITH AN ACCOUNT OF THE SUFFERINGS OF HER SURVIVING OFFICERS AND CREW, WHO WERE ENSLAVED BY THE WANDERING ARABS ON THE GREAT AFRICAN DESART, OR ZAHAHRAH; AND OBSERVATIONS HISTORICAL, GEOGRAPHICAL, &C. MADE DURING THE TRAVELS OF THE AUTHOR, WHILE A SLAVE TO THE ARABS, AND IN THE EMPIRE OF MOROCCO. BY JAMES RILEY, LATE MASTER AND

SUPERCARGO. PRECEDED BY A BRIEF SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR'S LIFE ; AND CONCLUDED BY A DESCRIPTION OF THE FAMOUS CITY OF TOMBUCTOO, ON THE RIVER NIGER, AND OF ANOTHER LARGE CITY, FAR SOUTH OF IT, ON THE SAME RIVER, CALLED WASSANAH ; NARRATED TO THE AUTHOR AT MOGADORE, BY SIDI HAMET, THE ARABIAN MERCHANT (Title capitalized by the writer / publisher).

The narrative which gained exaggerated popularity upon publication, (more than a million copies sold) propagated and marketed specific notions and concepts which served the politics and the socio-cultural atmosphere of the time. One of the reasons for the inexplicable popularity of the book was Abraham Lincoln's endorsement labeling it as "instructive and educational" and as one of the three most influential books he had ever read: the other two were the Bible and *The Pilgrims Progress* (McMurtry 133).

The famous Riley account was followed by a sequel that was published thirty four years later and was presumably written by Riley's son. The book tells of the return of Captain Riley to North Africa after he was ransomed and rescued back to the United States. The second book was significantly called "*Sequel to Riley's Narrative*":

Being A Sketch of Interesting Incidents in the Life, Voyages And Travels of Capt. James Riley, From the Period of his Return To His Native Land, After His Shipwreck, Captivity And Sufferings Among The Arabs Of The Desert, As Related In His Narrative, Until His Death. Compiled Chiefly from the Original Journal And Manuscripts Left at His Death In Possession Of His Son, W. Willshire Riley.

This second account is another 500-page account that claims to retell the shipwreck, captivity and sufferings of an American by the North African Arabs yet on reading it, one discovers it to be an anthropological, geo-political and cultural catalogue of Morocco and Algeria in the 19th century.

The third text that was produced in response to the Riley narrative is entitled *Skeletons on the Sahara, A true story of Survival* (2004) by maritime historian Dean King. To research the authenticity of Riley's book, Dean King embarked on a National Geographic Society sponsored expedition to retrace the horrific journey of Riley and his crew across the Saharan desert. He also found out that there was a second first-hand account written by Archibald Robbins, another surviving member of Riley's crew. King's announced intention was to verify the accuracy of

the account of the Riley journey. He decided to crosscheck the two accounts intensively. Finding that the two accounts corresponded to each other in most of the significant details, he secured a sizeable grant from his publisher and the National Geographic and decided to personally retrace the trip of the shipwrecked American crew across the hazards of the Sahara. Along with his team, he travelled for more than 100 miles on foot and on camelback trying to relive the experience in excruciating detail. King produced a cross-genre study that comprised documentation, cartography, ethnology (as he did not only document ethnographic data but he also analyzed and reached conclusions), cultural anthropology and a detailed re-telling of Riley's account.

The theoretical frame of this paper is informed by critical race theory (CRT). Although related to black slavery, this study aims to use critical race theory as the framework to read the selected stories of white slavery exposing their construction of white supremacy versus black barbarity. CRT has been applied extensively and effectively to legal cases and education to highlight the injustices that befall non-whites to this very day. This study, however, will be using the main tenet of the theory, namely that racism is inherent in White American thought, to question the underpinnings of the image of the white slave that was fore-fronted in the texts.

From the 1970s till the present, critics like Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, Richard Delgado and Kimberlé Crenshaw, to name only a few, have proposed and developed a theory that recognizes racism as a quotidian component of American life. Despite the fact that racism is, in principle, an illegalized practice, according to Lois Tyson, "it's just gone "underground." (367). The theory which started as a movement within American law schools extended to cover most academic and cultural disciplines because it brings to light the intersection between law, power and race. CRT's main hypothesis is that white supremacy is the main drive behind racial aggressions and that this hierarchical perception fosters and reproduces various types of - and responses to - racial injustices and intentional discriminations. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic in their seminal book *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* identify what they call the basic tenets of Critical Race Theory, the foremost of which is that racism is an ordinary every day practice for all people of color. 'Color' here includes anybody who does not conform to the elitist code of whiteness. They also posit that racism is a social construct. It is a cultural behavioral attitude that makes identity a product of intersectionality.

Philomena Essed suggests that whites are programmed to react strongly to people of color. She cites an incident of five black women law professors who were visiting a colleague in an affluent luxury condominium in Philadelphia. They are faced with what CRT coins as “every day racism” when they get into a spacious lift and “a few floors later, the door opened and a white woman in her late fifties peered in, let out a muffled cry of surprise, stepped back and let the door close without getting on. Several floors later ... another white middle-aged woman ... also decided not to get on” (331). Despite the professors’ appropriate apparel and behavior, what the white women saw and evaluated was exclusively their color.

This conviction of superiority, authority and distinctiveness had / has been meticulously nurtured in the psyche of the Caucasian race in general and White Christian Europeans in particular. Scientific racism of philosophers like Christoph Meiners, physicians like Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, cultural icons like Voltaire and numerous others reiterated the biological, intellectual and behavioral superiority of the White race; a concept that had been already cultivated by the Ancient Greeks and Romans. From the 5th century BC, Hippocrates notes that “[T]he idea that dark people are cowards, and light people courageous fighters, is found already in Airs, Waters, Places” (Isaac 356). Roman writer, architect, and engineer Vitruvius claims that:

...those races nearest to the southern half of the axis are of lower stature, with swarthy complexions, curly hair, black eyes, and little blood, on account of the sun. This poverty of blood makes them over-timid to stand up against the sword ... On the other hand, men born in cold countries are, indeed, ready to meet the shock of arms with great courage and without timidity (Isaac 83).

Captivity/Slave Narratives: Similarities and Differences

Before analyzing the afore-mentioned texts to demonstrate the overt and covert innuendoes that support the argument of the study, a short survey of similar types of narratives that recorded the misery of captivity will be of significance to comprehend the general socio-cultural picture.

As mentioned above, slavery is not a novel phenomenon. It is one of the oldest forms of social stratification. The first millennium and the three Holy Scriptures are replete with tales and evidences of inestimable

numbers of slaves. Slavery and slave trade predate written history going back to the earliest Sumerian and Mesopotamian civilizations and it seems such practices of trading and owning were in tandem with settled agricultural communities. The distinguishing differences between prisoners of war, captives and slaves are not of significance to this study. The common factor, however, would be losing one's liberty and therefore losing the capacity to take autonomous decisions. Other accompanying factors would be all forms of humility and exploitation historically associated with this disgraceful human tradition with very few exceptions. Traditionally, slavery has been associated with White domination of people of color but historically this fact is far from accurate. Though the practice of slavery is definitely not the civilized practice to be hailed by humanity, its accompanying attributions of hegemony, control and dominance were/are demarcations of supremacy. To this effect and with the interplay between powers and the continuous exchange of authority, the positions of enslaver/ enslaved have very often alternated.

The subject of this study is the account(s) of a White Christian American slave held by Arabs, hence its classification under slave literature. Nevertheless, in modern American literature, the sub-genre that is fore-grounded in slave narratives is that of the plight of Black African slaves in America and the infamous Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. A simple comparison between both sub-genres would unveil the apparent similarities as they both are autobiographical texts which attempt to document their enslavement experience by recounting significant and insignificant personal and impersonal details. The writer's objective is typically to tell a story (a tragic one in this case), to document and historicize a situation and invariably to benefit financially from selling the story. The main difference, however, between both enslavements was the concept of permanence versus transience as, contrary to the Black slaves in America, the White slaves in Barbary were always awaiting to be ransomed by their respective families or governments.

This would lead us to the argumentative questions of this study; should these kinds of narratives, written by white European and American Christians to record their plight of incarceration by Arab Muslims be categorized under the well-defined sub-genre of slave narratives as they have always been? Do the protagonists of these narratives fit under the classification of typical full-fledged slaves? Were the literary intentions of writing these narratives as stated or were there political agendas and subtexts? Would the inherent and inherited conviction in white supremacy obstruct the clichéd image of the slave and therefore present an inverted mirror image of the typical master-slave relation? The

rereading of these texts attempts to prove how the marketing of the plight of a white slave was subtly employed in reinforcing the imperial discourse; in constructing a convenient image of the “other” for the imminent colonists that were embarking on their mission.

The Barbarians of Barbary

Despite the fact that the subject of this study is an account of an American slave in Barbary; its specificity cannot be fully grasped without going back to Anglo-Barbary relations. According to Nabil Matar, “the term “Barbary”, was not used in North African Arabic or Turkish languages, but to English writers it referred to the Ottoman regencies of Libya (Tripolitania), Tunisia and Algeria and to the Kingdom of Morocco” (3). The inaccurate generalization of the assigned nomenclature is/was a normative White practice as the “Barbary states constituted distinct geopolitical entities...Morocco was independent of Ottoman rule, while Algeria, Tunisia and Libya had both Ottoman pashas...and Ottoman troops” (3). Diplomatic and military relations between Barbary and Britain go back to the reign of Queen Elizabeth I who had close political ties with Mulay Ahmed al-Mansur of Morocco. These ties “swung between cooperation and conflict, trade and piracy and were often determined by the crisis of captivity that dominated the policies” (Matar ix). Up until the reign of the British monarch Charles II in 1685, the Anglo-Barbary relations were intensely disturbed with the “captivity of thousands of Britons – men, women and children – and the inability or unwillingness of the monarchs to liberate them” (Matar ix). Matar uses the two words ‘inability’ and ‘unwillingness’ accurately. One of the un-highlighted reasons for the Civil Wars in England and the parliament opposition to King Charles was the king’s ineptitude towards the crisis of the captives.

In the same vein, historian Linda Colley in her groundbreaking book *Captives: Britain Empire and the World 1600-1850* (2002) foregrounds the fact that the political glory, military supremacy and economic dominance of the Victorian Age were in fact preceded by what Colley calls a collective act of amnesia. From the 12th century to the 17th century, Britain sailed through uncharted waters because of the presence of a power that was then defined by its military and economic sophistication; namely the Arabs of North Africa. The political and economic priorities of the European nations in general and Britain in particular were not to protect the merchant ships nor to ransom the captives but to maintain solid diplomatic relations with the rulers of this region. Another priority was to protect their shores from diverse enemies. The case was somewhat different with the acts of piracy in the

Mediterranean as they were not considered acts of political transgression but were semi-legalized as sea-borne trade and were equally performed by all nationalities on the sea. Before setting sail, the sea merchants would be concerned about any adverse encounter with Arab corsairs or European privateers as their ships, goods and population would be looted. In *American Slaves and African Masters*, Sears recounts the following historical incident:

Martha W. Routh and her fellow passengers felt sick every time another vessel approached the one carrying her from England to Boston...She uneasily contemplated being captured by the French. French privateers would undoubtedly reroute them to France...and possibly claim her personal belongings. (7)

From the Western perspective, marine adversaries were of two categories: European privateers who were granted letters of marque by their respective governments and were granted the right to attack, plunder and confiscate. These were considered by their governments as parallel navies. The opposite side of the picture was represented by the Muslim corsairs from the Ottoman Empire and the North African region. Routh's friend, William Rotch's account of his fears aboard the ship takes a different turn on mentioning the corsairs:

Algerian corsairs were a different matter altogether...felt an all-encompassing terror when he thought of Algerians bearing down on their ship...Though they took fewer ships, corsairs threatened their victims' "lives and liberties" in a way that the French did not...Filippo Pananti likened Algerian corsairs to Medusa: both froze those who gazed on them with horror (Sears 7).

The likening the corsairs to Medusa is in fact highly debatable. Similar to the Western pirates, the Arab corsairs' objective was material gain. It is a historical fact indeed that the European privateers' main concern of plundering did not usually include human abduction and that the Arab corsairs abducted both goods and people. However, similar to the privateers, the corsairs' primary goal was money. People were not taken as slaves with the intention of keeping them (like the trans-Atlantic slaves in the Americas) but for their prospective ransom money which was provided either by their families or their governments. The possibility of being attacked in the sea evoked apprehension but the appearance of the Mohametans (Muslim corsairs) evoked utter horror.

The “Whites” were terrorized by their long beards, strange language and unusual attire. The overriding reputation of the Moors or Algerines (as they were sometimes called) projected by the Whites in their writings was unconstructive and sweepingly generalized. In 1798, John Foss and his crewmates inform their white readers that the Algerian *rais* and his “ravenous wolves” with their “scymitres and pistols” who plundered their trade ship promised them to “experience the most abject slavery” (Panzac 98, 99). The main drive for their alarm, in fact, was their fear of the unknown; of the stereotypical image of the barbarian Arab Muslims propagated by the European cultural archive as represented in the literature, travelogues and rumors in circulation since the Middle Ages or the early encounters of Arab/ Muslims and Western/Christians. Needless to say, such stereotypes have been time and again explained in terms of the orientalist discourse which has been traditionally driven by political agendas.

Riley, the White American Slave

Riley’s account was a cultural indicator of the growing interest of the reading public back then. It satisfied the demand for reading such accounts which appealed to the curiosity of the innocent reader on the one hand and nurtured the imperialist discourse on the other. It is worth noting that the ratio of the number of American slaves versus European slaves is disproportional. Their number approximated 700 which is relatively small in comparison to the more than one million Europeans documented to have suffered from slavery from 1530 to 1780 (Davis 23). The number of American hostages/slaves increased, however, after the declaration of American Independence. This was partly due to a change in political and trade patterns and agreements and partly due to an increase in the number of American ships sailing in the region after independence. Captain James Riley’s account was one of the most widely read accounts that intrigued the curiosity of the American reader. Riley’s ship was not attacked. He and his crew were shipwrecked along the North African shores in August 1815. After failing to salvage the ship and the supplies, Riley and his eight shipmates landed on the Western Sahara. Riley was careful to mention the full names of his crew. However, he does not overlook the genealogy of the cook and brackets him as ‘a black man’:

A light cargo was taken on board, and I shipped a crew, consisting of the following persons, namely; George Williams, chief mate, Aaron R. Savage, second mate, William Porter, Archibald Robbins, Thomas Burns, and James Clark, seamen, Horace Savage, cabin boy, and Richard Deslisle, (a black man) cook (Sufferings 8).

Contrary to typical slave narratives, this discriminatory perspective that is dominated by the feeling of supremacy and distinctiveness is upheld throughout the account. Riley's description of the first natives is significant and deserves to be cited in full:

He appeared to be about five feet seven or eight inches high, and of a complexion between that of an American Indian and negro. He had about him, to cover his nakedness, a piece of coarse woolen cloth, that reached from below his breast nearly to his knees; his hair was long and bushy, resembling a pitch mop, sticking out every way six or eight inches from his head ; his face resembled that of an ourang- outang more than a human being ; his eyes were red and fiery; his mouth, which stretched nearly from ear to ear, was well lined with sound teeth; and a long curling beard, which depended from his upper lip and chin down upon his breast, gave him altogether a most horrid appearance, and I could not but imagine that those well set teeth were sharpened for the purpose of devouring human flesh !! (Sufferings 20-21).

Riley's first glimpse of the native places the stranger in the category of sub-human creatures. Claiming he has prior experience in the human race and that he "had before seen in different parts of the world, the human face and form in its most hideous and terrific shape" (21), the desert native is positioned at the bottom of the list. He is then followed by his family; two women whom the writer assumes to be his wives with "two eye-teeth (that) stuck out like hogs' tusks "(21) and a number of his children. All the family is described as entirely naked. The image of primitiveness is further associated with that of threat and danger. The family's intention, according to Riley, was to plunder their belongings.

Armed with an English hammer, an axe and some long knives, they “broke open trunks, chests, and boxes, and emptied them of their contents, carrying the clothing on their backs up on the sand hills, where they spread them out to dry. They emptied the beds of their contents, wanting only the cloth” (21). Riley continues to highlight the aggressors’ main area of looting interest. He writes that he “had an adventure of silk laced veils and silk handkerchiefs, the former of which the man, women, and children tied round their heads in the form of turbans; the latter round their legs and arms, though only for a short time” which they also took “and stowed... away among the other clothing on the sand hills” (21).

Having formerly described the natives as “fully naked”, it seemed quite unexpected and improbable (though not impossible) that the natives would only pillage cloth and leave all other goods. Riley concludes this episode by assuring his readers (exclusively White American back then) that “we had no fire or side arms, but we could easily have driven these creatures off with handspikes” (22) but they chose not to. Riley clarifies the fact that he “used all the arguments in my power to induce my men to endeavor to conciliate the friendship of these natives, but it was with the greatest difficulty I could restrain some of them from rushing on the savages and putting them to death, if they could have come up with them” (22). What restrained the crew from doing so is that they could not compete with the running abilities of the natives who could “run like the wind, whilst we could with difficulty move in the deep sand” (22).

In addition to the purposeful reference to traditional slave narratives written by blacks, the objective of the above close reading of one of the earliest parts of the text is an attempt to map out some of the obvious inconsistencies or discrepancies presented by the writer. My intention is neither to present a biased reading nor to prove the inaccuracy of the account but to trace, through a narrative written by the victimized himself that the position of the oppressed slave does not fully apply in this context. Despite their stated unfortunate and underprivileged situation, Riley and his mates set the terms of the master – slave equation from the very first encounter. Regardless of the fact that they are shipwrecked, debilitated, shocked, outnumbered and scared of the unknown, the writer assures the readers that his crew remained audacious and valorous. The fact that they were attacked by a number of naked

“orangutans”, as Riley decided to classify them, does not impinge on their intrinsic feeling of supremacy and leverage. Though the concurrently-written African-American slave narratives are not the main subject of this study, a casual comparison between both slave narratives show that the perspective and application of enslavement vary significantly.

After the orangutan encounter, Riley and his mates are stranded in the desert for a few days. Having failed to fix their ship, they wander aimlessly in/on the Sahara under a scorching sun and an antagonistic topography. With depleting provisions, the crew questions the possibility of their survival. Death looms and they “thought ... that it was time enough to lie down and die, when we could not walk” (Sufferings 59). Their hope of survival is rekindled on seeing signs of encampment and a flame of fire. Their expectations are pragmatic befitting the socio-economic, cultural, political and legal contexts of the nineteenth century:

I had no doubt of their being Arabs, who would take and hold us as slaves, and though I did not expect myself to live but a short time in that condition, I presumed some of my fellow sufferers might, and that it was a decree of Providence which had set this alternative before us (Sufferings 62).

As per their expectations, and after another negative encounter with other natives whose behavior was extremely violent and gory, they are later found by desert nomads who abduct them and divide them among themselves as desert spoils for future trading off, sale or ransom money. Henceforth, Riley and his mates begin their journey of enslavement in Barbary. The two introductory confrontations with desert inhabitants that are augmented with pathetic details by Riley prepare the nineteenth century White American readers (as they were the target audience) to expect the most brutal manifestations of enthrallment. This was an age when American society had been a strong and practicing proponent of slavery for more than two centuries. Although this ‘tradition’ was beginning to be dismantled after the American independence and after the American Civil War, it was still vehemently supported, especially in the South, by the government, society and the Church. It is needless to note that with the exchange of the slaver/enslaved positions, the situation would be expected to alter significantly. With their compatriots and

coreligionists in the inferior state, the white reading public sympathized with the slaves and strongly denounced the related practice.

Riley's narrative can be compared to a traveler's diary in which all the daily details are documented by date, place and description. A thorough reading of the text, backed with the relevant cultural and political background, subverts the expected image of enslavement despite Riley's insistence that his situation represented a classic case of slavery. The clear cut details, provided by the writer himself and by his son in the sequel and which were, more than a century later verified by Stephen King, contradict the case. Despite the fact that Riley's freedom was restricted and despite his reiteration that he was a slave, his six hundred and twenty page epistle recounts an experience that lasted for two months only from August to October 1817; the first three weeks of which were spent as a slave to the Berbers while the rest of the duration was devoted by the Berber 'masters' to return them to their embassy and to claim the ransom money, a tradition that was fully legalized at the time.

Riley and the Politics of White Slavery

White slavery in the American context has always been related to the intrinsic nature of slavery in the US. In his book, *Building an Antislavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement, 1830-1860*, Richard Blackett writes that "it was one thing to enslave a black person but enslaving a white woman was totally reprehensible' (125). While the focus in this statement is on white women, it can stretch to cover men as well since what is of interest here is the question of color rather than gender. This question of white slavery has been referred to as "the American paradox" by Carol Wilson and Calvin D. Wilson They conclude their detailed study on this issue by the following observation:

That some whites were formally and fully enslaved was a horrifying, unanticipated result of slavery, but one that those in power were willing to tolerate. Thus was brought about one of American history's greatest paradoxes: the deeply rooted belief in white supremacy unwittingly fostered white slavery (19).

Again, though the above article surveys different cases of mulattoes, quadroons or octoroons or anybody with fair complexion and light hair that was taken as slave despite not conforming to the typical code of

blackness, its relevance here is its solid hypothesis of the Whites' conviction of White supremacy hence lies the "American paradox".

Riley was only a product of ideas and beliefs propagated by the principles of Eurocentric racism. With this sub/un/conscious lore of White supremacy in mind, Riley 'assumes' the position of a slave. As a White Christian American male in the nineteenth century, Riley's belief in his 'whiteness' is expected to have surfaced to the top. However, what the reader gets contradicts the hypothesis. The title and the details of the narrative catered towards highlighting the tragic predicament of a white slave. Riley's story with slavery begins after being offered for sale to Sidi Hamet in the context of dividing desert spoils. From the first day, to Hamet, the significance of Riley and his mates lies in their prospective ransom money. Riley opens his narrative with a note to the reader which sets its dominant mood describing his story as the "narrative of my misfortune and sufferings". He underlines the fact that he is neither an academic writer nor a creative one but his intention is merely to record "in plain and unvarnished language...scenes of real and heart-appalling distresses" (Sufferings10). The details provided by Riley reveal hardships and sufferings. However, these very same details also reveal that the majority of Riley's afflictions result from his physical and psychological inability to bear the harshness of an alien desert environment. Apart from longing to be united with his wife and five children, his complaints can be summarized in blisters on his feet and hands, extremely parched lips and severe cases of diarrhea because of drinking or eating unwisely after long stretches of abstinence. The fragility of his Caucasian white skin is incompatible with the extremity of the desert climate. His daily chores of walking the camels or drawing water or feeding the animals prevent the quick healing of his blisters. The chores assigned to him by the desert nomads are extremely tedious not because of their difficulty or impossibility but because of his ineptitude in climbing sand hills or even walking on the soft sands. He comments on this fact saying:

The Arabs had been much amused in observing our difficulty in ascending the height, and kept up a laugh while they were *whipping* us forward. Their women and children were on foot as well as themselves, and went up without the smallest difficulty or

inconvenience, though it was extremely hard for the camels to mount (Sufferings 71, my emphasis).

The mention of “whipping” in the above statement is likely to evoke its due reverberations in the mind and memory of the White American readers of the nineteenth century as they would either be Northerners who had resented the whip or Southerners whose main tool of torturing and taming of black slaves was the whip. However, Riley does not mention the whip again during his stay under the authority of Sidi Hamet nor does he claim, in this individual incident, that the whip was used physically but only to ‘whip them forward’. Though Riley neither negates nor confirms the fact that he was humiliated by the whip, his documenting style that is characterized by the provision of the minutest details indicate that the whip was not used or else its repercussions would have been employed masterfully to tantalize the senses of his readers. On the other hand, Riley mentions specific incidents that support the argument that his suffering was not due to the severity of his enslavers but because of the severity of the natural environment.

The fact that he experienced painful moments of dire hunger or thirst or sickness is represented as a byproduct of inhabiting the desert not because of his transient position as a slave. One of Riley’s earliest encounters with the nomads (before being taken by Hamet) shows that scarcity of provisions affected both parties; the ‘masters’ and the ‘slaves’. He states that they “begged for something to eat, but these Arabs had nothing for themselves, and seemed very sorry it was not in their power to give us some food” (Sufferings 68). During his sojourn with Hamet and his brother, Riley reiterates that all food, camel milk and water, when available, was shared.

Riley also mentions numerous situations when his desert blisters and wounds evoked the sympathy of his masters.

Towards evening a great number of the men "having collected in a little valley, we were made to stop, and as our bodies were blistered and burnt to such a degree as to excite pity in the breasts of some of the men, they used means to have a tent cleared out for us to sit under. They then allowed all those of our crew present to sit under it (Sufferings 76).

However, in other situations, Riley mentions that they were not allowed to sit in the shade of the tents and to “increase my distresses as much as

they could drove me away from the shade of the tent, so that I was forced to remain in the scorching sun for the remainder of this long day” (89, my emphasis). Riley fails to notice the cultural specificity of this situation as ‘they’ in the statement refers to the women of the desert community. The women react similarly every time Riley begs to protect himself under the tent where they stay.

[The night came on; cold damp winds succeeded to the heat of the day, and I begged of my old master to be permitted to go under the corner of his tent, (for it was a large one) and he seemed willing, pointing out a place for us to lie down in, but the women would not consent, and we remained outside until the men had milked the camels (Sufferings 90).

Later in the night,

... after the women were asleep, one of my young masters, named Omar, took pity on our distresses, and came and made us creep under one corner of the tent, without waking the women ... and here we slept soundly until morning. As soon as the women awoke, and found us under the tent, they were for thrusting us out with blows ... and the old man looking on us, seemed somewhat concerned, fearing (as I thought) he might lose his property. He told his women to let us alone, and as he was absolute, they were forced to obey him, though with every appearance of reluctance (Sufferings 91).

The text is replete with similar instances that demonstrate cultural misinterpretations as well as inconsistencies that defy logic and common sense. This could have been for marketing purposes to increase readership of the book through sensationalist tales that would nurture the expectations of a western audience hankering after the exotic. However, this study attempts to prove that the objective of the narrative is not only to promote the typical orientalist image of Muslims or Arabs or Africans or non-whites that had been propagated by the West. Another intention was to invert and subvert the typical image of the slave for the purpose of logicizing and justifying nascent modern imperialism. Though America as a nation was not an imperial power in the nineteenth century, its White Christian nationals of Anglo-Saxon genealogy were representatives of this widespread ideology. Exemplary situations and reactions from Riley’s narrative demonstrate that his unfortunate experience as a ‘slave’ for three weeks only was an indirect tool in promoting and justifying imperialistic policies and his/their story/ies as slave(s) was/were in fact a “tool for empire”. This does not apply to 19th century wave of imperialism exclusively. Lisa Voigts in *Writing Captivity in the Early Modern Atlantic* (2009) examines 16th and 17th century Spanish and

Portuguese narratives of captivity and also shows how “captives' linguistic and cultural knowledge of the captors' cultures became a tool of empire” (qtd in Sayre 327). Though most of the detailed situations are meticulously narrated in the text to cater towards cementing the image of the suffering victimized White slave, the outcome defeats the desired purpose.

From the first day of ‘belonging’ to Hamet, Riley begins referring to himself as a slave. He positions Hamet in the master role and calls him Sidi Hamet. This reiteration of the master-slave image through the persistent use of variants of the word *slave*, one hundred and sixty eight times to be exact, is not supported by contextual evidences that promote this type of humiliating experience. In fact, apart from participating in the daily desert rituals required for survival, such as feeding, walking and watering the camels, there is no evidence in the narrative of slavery-related acts. It is also noteworthy that every so often the adjective “barbarian” is used to describe their state of slavery. Whether the adjective refers to the type of behavior or to the region of Barbary, it is usually ambiguous but to the common reader, the connotations of barbarism would probably come to mind.

Riley is clear on the privileged position he held as a “white” slave. Before being purchased by Hamet, Riley had ‘belonged’ to another Arab; the one who had rescued him in the earlier encounter with the natives. He informs his readers that his old master had two ‘negro slaves’ who did the menial chores and therefore did not “employ” him or his mate Clark “in the same way” (98). In addition, when Hamet arrives as a wandering merchant to exchange goods and eventually purchase Riley and Clark, the white ‘slaves’ are not asked to perform any of the chores. In fact, it is the women of the ‘masters’ who do so:

They next ran to our tent, and took a couple of sticks, with the help of which and the skin and tent cloth, they soon made an awning for the strangers. This done, they took the bundles which were on the camels, and placed them in this tent with the saddles and all the other things the strangers had brought. The two strangers had a couple of skins that contained water, which the women hung up on a frame they carried from our tent (Sufferings 100).

One of the women comes to Riley and informs him that Hamet might buy him and “carry me there, if he chose, where I might find my friends, and kiss my wife and children” (100); hence supporting the argument that Riley’s perpetual references to being doomed to slavery (13, 25, 43) were effectively negated and his persistent prayers to be redeemed by God

were constantly reassured. Furthermore, on first meeting Hamet, Riley ‘begs’ him for a drink. Despite the unnecessary use of the verb ‘beg’ Hamet asks his brother to “to give me some water, but this his benevolent brother would not condescend to do; so taking the bowl himself, he poured into it near a quart of clear water, saying, "Sherub Rias"—that is, drink, captain, or chief” (101) as Hamet had learned that Riley was the captain of the wrecked ship. Riley implores Hamet to buy him as he finds him “a very intelligent and feeling man ...that he actually shed tears at the recital of my distresses, notwithstanding that, among the Arabs, weeping is regarded as a womanish weakness” (103).

Other situations include details like “our masters made me a pair of sandals with two thickness of the camel's skin; they also made Horace a pair in the same manner...they had in the morning given me a small knife, which I hung to my neck in a case: this they meant as a mark of confidence; and they also gave me charge of their stuff, the camels, and the slaves”. This “mark of confidence” was shown as they were “preparing for...departure” (112) right after being purchased. Hamet’s intention to deliver Riley and his mates to the Atlantic port, Swearah where they would be ransomed by their embassy is explicitly stated the moment they leave. He tells Riley the exact amount of money he had paid for them and that “through the blessing of God, I should once more embrace my family;... that he had expended all his property, and that if I had not told him the truth, he was a ruined man (113). The rest of the narrative (more than three-quarters of the text) is dedicated to their desert journey to Swearah and the hardships they overcome together, be they attacks from fellow desert inhabitants or environmental misfortunes.

In the second half of the text, entitled “Observations of Africa” the narrative evolves differently. While Riley still continues to assume the semblance of the slave in servitude of the master, the subtext(s) of the narrative serve a different purpose. With the inversion and subversion of roles, the slave becomes in control. Riley allows Hamet to tell his own story hence allowing the subaltern to speak. Although Hamed (or Hamet as Riley writes) does not fit the criteria of the subaltern as he is neither invisible nor impoverished nor voiceless in his community, Riley places him in this position and privileges him with a voice. The export or import of knowledge by the West from or to the ‘other’ more often than not

involves an economic and/or political subtext. Hamet recounts to Riley, who is supposedly of inferior status, details of his personal life. He begins the story by mentioning his wife and describing her as “a beautiful woman” (314), an overture that needs to be questioned when taking into consideration the nineteenth century Islamic-Bedouin context. The stories narrated by Hamet reflect not only the harshness of the desert but also the harshness of relations between desert inhabitants. These apprehensions include being burdened with the customs and behaviors of fellow natives i.e. the continual fighting, raids by desert robbers, revenges, short tempers etc. Some stories reveal betrayals between brothers, disloyalties to elders and exaggerations in reactions; all of which reflect the stereotypical images of the emotional, irrational dependent ‘other’. In addition to his ‘role’ as a slave, Riley assumes other roles. He is the psychiatrist to whom Hamet reveals his worries and predicaments. He also assumes the role of the audience or listener of tales. The other role is that of the traditional White anthropologist who produces through the collected stories and through his observations and perceptions an in-depth insider’s documentary from a socio-cultural historical perspective; a perspective that is usually colored by the writer’s and not the speaker’s objectives. Riley provides historical and political data of the Moroccan palace. He presents detailed demographic statistics of many Moroccan cities. One example of which is “Swearah or Mogadore (which) contains about thirty-six thousand souls; that is, thirty thousand Moors and six thousand Jews: this may be a high estimation for Tombuctoo; making it two hundred and sixteen thousand inhabitants” (332). He also educates his readers with a sociological evaluation of the status of the Jews in the region describing them as “miserable wretches” desperate “to procure a little water or food for their hungry and thirsty families” (397).

Riley’s Sequel as a Cultural Geographic Text

This ethnographic and ethnological approach continues, or as a matter of fact, predominates the Riley sequel which was published supposedly by Riley’s son thirty four years later. Again the sequel’s subtitle reiterates his “shipwreck, captivity and sufferings among the Arabs of the desert”. However, the introduction of the book written by the publishers dated 1851 states otherwise:

Certain works there are, which, on account of their portraying graphically and truthfully the customs and manners of the inhabitants of certain sections of the world or epochs of time, become standard works. Such works are not mere literary or scientific mushrooms of an hour, nor are they sought alone by readers living in the day, or age, or section, that produced them. But, being a collection of facts, or theories, or sentiments, or events, or historic portraits, belonging to that day, or age, or section, they possess an interest permanent, perpetual, enduring throughout all after generations (*Sequel* iii).

De facto, the content of the text strongly relates to the introductory note and not to the title. The book, which is supposed to be “compiled chiefly from the Original Journal and Manuscripts left at his death in possession of his son, W. WILLSHIRE RILEY” (title page) is mostly a detailed descriptive geographical, historical, political cultural account of the North African Western Sahara. The text is comprised of sixteen chapters and an 83-page appendix of the correspondence exchanged between Riley and various American officials. One of numerous similar examples is the following summary included at the beginning of each chapter:

Algiers, its civil divisions -Rivers - Mountains - Climate - Soil, &c. Animals - Birds - Reptiles and Insects - Antiquities -The city anterior to the French Conquest-Manufactures - Trade -Inhabitants -Corsairs - Doubtful form of its government - Ignorance of the people - Printing prohibited -Historical Sketch - Conquered by the Romans, Vandals and Saracens -Exterminating wars and country reduced to a desert— Re-peopled by colony of Fezzans - Conquered and annexed to Morocco - Reconquered by the Arabians - Made tributary to Spain -Barbarossa, the pirate, murders Prince Eutemi and is proclaimed King - Cruelty of Barbarossa - His death - Hayradin, his successor - Mole built by 30,000 christian slaves - Hassan Aga appointed bashaw - Ravages coasts of Spain and Italy - Expedition of Charles V. against Algiers —Destruction of his Fleet and Army.

A glance at this randomly chosen summary reveals the subtext of Riley’s travel account. It is reminiscent of *Doomsday Book* that was written upon

the order of William the Conqueror in 1086, to document the holdings of England, so as to assess the amount of taxes. But unlike *Doomsday Book* whose objective was directly stated, this narrative is presented under the umbrella of the victimized suffering White such as “the 30,000 Christian slaves who built the mole”. In addition, the richness and bounty of the region is brought forward to be juxtaposed with the “ignorance of the people” and the inefficiency of its rulers thus suggesting the need for a more sensible form of authoritative guidance. Another focal point is the reference to the succession of invaders and conquerors of the region, thereby, justifying the imminent and necessary western occupation of the region. All these reflections would be encapsulated a few decades later in Rudyard Kipling’s emblematic poem ‘The Whiteman’s Burden’; the burden that validated, defended and glorified imperialism of the ‘non-whites’.

Take up the White Man's burden,
Send forth the best ye breed
Go bind your sons to exile,
to serve your captives' need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild—
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child (1899)]

This text that demonstrates to the White American reader their compatriots’ “sufferings among the Arabs of the desert” also highlights the facilities and potentials for future abode.

The Bay of Gibraltar is spacious and easy of access, containing a free port, at which hundreds of our merchant vessels touch annually, either for purposes of trade—to obtain information with regard to other markets—to procure supplies of provisions and stores—for shelter in tempestuous weather, or to repair damages and losses sustained at sea (53).

Detailed examples of the extent and variety of the natural resources awaiting to be ‘wisely’ exploited are too numerous for the scope of this study. However, it is worth mentioning that this practice of bounty-counting is not peculiar to the texts at hand. Nabil Matar provides a literary review of the English writers starting from the 17th century who realized the economic worth of Barbary hence defining its significance and positioning it in British political agenda. Writers like Samuel

Purchas, Edward Grimstone, John Speed, Peter Heylyn to name a few described in detail the affluence and prosperity of Barbary. Barbary was a land of “oyles, honie, wax, sugar, cotton, goats haire...and mines of gold” and about the social life of the community, “ the ciuilitie of them of Fez, their good line stoues, innes, trafficke of mills, distinct dwellings for meckanicke arts” (qtd in Matar 41). In addition to goods, Heylyn also describes “Mulay al-Mansur’s al-Badee’ palace...with its “three Globes made of pure gold”...the references to Morocco’s military power, consisting of “60000 Horse” (Matar 44).

The final segment of the sequel is entitled “Review of Sidi Hamet’s Narrative” (412- 446). It is again a rewriting of the original story presumably recounted by Hamet to Riley supplemented with an introduction, comments on the events and analysis of characters. This part comes after a long series of correspondence from and to Captain Riley. The letters are not only from American officials but from various readers who demonstrate their appreciation of and sympathy with Riley. The letters, all signed and dated, cater towards the veracity and authenticity of the information. The Hamet review starts with the following comment:

In Sidi Hamet's statements and narrations there is much to interest, and some things, it must be admitted, were apparently improbable, or at least, in some measure apochryphal: or what, more properly speaking, did not comport with our previous information from what are considered reliable authorities on geographical questions (413).

The improbability and apocryphalness of Hamet’s story is forwarded despite the fact the Hamet “was possessed of more than ordinary intelligence” (*Sequel* 412). By the testament of Mr. Willshire of Mogadore, and Mr. Kenshaw of London, Hamet is an “an excellent character for integrity and veracity” and “in his narration no inducement could have existed to operate on him to depart from facts which he represented as having fallen under his observation, and the localities which he describes” (413). In order to account for any discrepancy in the Riley account and/ or to undermine the information provided by Hamet, the following justification is given:

Much allowance should undoubtedly be made for the circumstances of Capt. Riley's condition of body and mind at that time, as well as from the details being given through an interpreter

in some measure, and rendered to Capt. Riley perhaps in ' bad Spanish,' as intimated by the writer of the following critique, by whom all the circumstances are carefully and judiciously weighed and learnedly examined (413).

The degree of facticity however is not the concern of this study. In fact, what is worth noting is the persistence and insistence on framing the suffering and misery of Riley, the slave, at the hands of the savage barbarians. This tone prevails even in the letters written by ordinary readers whose objectivity and neutrality are overridden by their inherent white supremacy.

The same line of argument is sustained in the 2004 version of the 'story' despite the presumed evolution and refinement of human rights in particular and of humanity and humaneness in general. The front and back cover of the book are more than revealing. The title is "*Skeletons on the Zaharah*" despite the fact that only one person of the ship's crew died. In the subtitle, "*A True Story of Survival*", the 'story' is preceded by 'true' thus subconsciously authenticating the content. On the back cover, well-known literary reviewers describe the book as "a riveting tale of suffering and redemption", "a narrative of chilling miseries and harrowing adventure". Charles Slack describes the book as an "incredibly true tale ... of shipwrecked Americans" who were exposed to "extreme tests of cruelty and savagery". He commends "the sweet notes of nobility and kindness that transcend culture, language and the burning sands". Finally, in his endorsement of the text, Dr. D.J. Ratcliffe, Emeritus Reader of the History Department, University of Durham grants it the rating of "A grand book" (back cover n.p). The content of the book is a retelling of the same story after King had retraced the same routes to verify the Riley details. The geographical verification can be accounted for as Riley, the sailor, had provided exact longitudinal and latitudinal data as well as detailed topographical descriptions. As for the details of the events, conversations, and personal encounters, there is no binding evidence of how King reached the solid conclusion of the authenticity of the Riley account and thereof validating his miseries and humiliation as a slave. King ends his research/narrative with a list of notes in which he questions and usually justifies some of the inconsistencies of the original

narrative. The reasons given range from poor translations, confusions or in some cases exaggeration to appeal to the reader:

Riley certainly exaggerates when he says he “could not but imagine that those well set teeth were sharpened for the purpose of devouring human flesh!!!” A little more subdued, Robbins writes that the man had “gnashing” teeth. Both were playing to their audience’s fear of cannibals” (324).

Conclusion:

The nineteenth century was the age of Imperialism with the flourishing of Western powers namely the British, French, German powers and towards the end of the century the emergence of the United States. It was also the age of re-discovering the ‘other’ with the announced objective of civilizing the savage heathens and educating the ignorant. Needless to say, the unannounced objective was the unconditioned and uncontrolled military expansion which resulted in abductions of lands, erasure of civilizations and in most severe cases genocide of masses.

Thus, Riley’s travel account, its sequel and 2004 rewriting can be considered holistically as an exemplary text which transforms the narrative of captivity from a journey of suffering to a cultural and ethnographic account ostensibly detached from the colonial enterprise, while in truth insidiously supporting the projects of political and economic imperialism.

Riley’s account of the encounter with the “other” in the context of slavery constitutes a “contact zone”, to use Mary Louise Pratt’s term (Pratt, 1999). One of the aims of this paper has been to deconstruct, subvert and destabilize well-established, scientifically proven “White Supremacy” claims. Ostensibly, the narrative was that of the dehumanization of a White (Riley) by an inferior “Other”. The paradox, as the study attempted to unveil, was that the story of the enslavement of Riley (among numerous others) with all its exaggerations, inaccuracies and inconsistencies paved the path towards the political and economic hegemony of the west over their colonial subjects in Africa and the Arab/Islamic world later. The story of Riley and other “Rileys” presented in similar stories that were published then show that those who claimed to

be victims of the Empire were rather tools for the flourishing and stabilizing of the Empire.

The seeds of supremacy that had been so meticulously planted and nurtured in Riley, as a representative of the whites, are expected and reluctantly accepted against the socio-cultural political context of that age. It is the re-writing of the narrative in 2004 and the reiteration of the same discriminatory values that prove that the belief in White Supremacy is ingrained in the psyche of the Whites as stated by critical race theorists. Despite all the contributions of the non-whites towards civilization on Planet Earth, Eurocentric racism remains a hardcore fact that needs constant re-visiting because as the African proverb says until the lion learns to write, every story will glorify the hunter.

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