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UAW Strike, West Campus Picket, day one, UC Santa Barbara.
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**Culture of Captivity:
Piracy, Slavery, and Cultural Contact in the Mediterranean**

*Samuel Ricci*¹

On Easter Tuesday of 1678, the *Speedwell* set sail from Exeter on a long voyage meant to travel across the Atlantic Ocean to Newfoundland, Bilbao and the Canary Islands, and then back to England.² Unfortunately for many crew members, the ship would never see home again. The journey was cut short when Barbary corsairs set upon the *Speedwell*, and the crew would be captured and sold into slavery in the port city of Algiers. Among those captured was a young sailor, just fourteen or fifteen years of age, who would go on to serve as an enslaved person for the next fifteen years of his life, observing the Muslim world very closely. During these fifteen years, the young man was forced to convert to Islam and became the first Englishman on record to make the hadj to Mecca before he was freed and escaped to England.³ The young man's name was Joseph Pitts. He would record his experiences in *A Faithful Account of the Religion and Manners of the Mabometans* a decade after his escape. This text revealed a nuanced understanding of Muslim life that might seem surprising, considering that the man who wrote it had been captured and abused by Muslim corsairs, slave traders, and enslavers. Pitts was part of a long tradition of freed captives narrating their accounts of the Barbary corsairs and North Africa. Across the centuries, these accounts can potentially offer a large variety of different perspectives on this experience. This posed a question for me: how did the Barbary corsairs' capturing of Europeans inform the understanding of North African Muslim society and religion, and how were Christian-Muslim relations affected?

From the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, piracy ravaged the Mediterranean Sea. Hundreds of thousands were captured and enslaved by these corsairs, primarily along the coasts of North Africa, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Morocco, and Egypt. Of the small minority who achieved freedom, several would record or express their experiences in autobiographies, histories, and even literature. Animosity and distaste for the North Africans and Turks are found in virtually all European captivity narratives throughout this period, regardless of the religious background or country of origin of the enslaved, with the only significant divergence being which elements of North African society the writers found to be particularly obscene and vile. The primary difference between these narratives is Europeans' conception of the culture, religion, and society of their captors and masters. This knowledge evolved throughout the early modern period to become more understanding and tolerant of these things, allowing them to reflect upon European society.

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² Joseph Pitts, *A Faithful Account of the Religion and Manners of the Mabometans...The Fourth Edition* (London: T. Longman, 1738), p. 2.

³ Pitts, *A Faithful Account*, p. 121, p. 180.

Studying the Barbary corsairs and captivity narratives from North Africa as part of the broader history of Christian-Muslim relations is not a new field of study. During the late 1960s through the early 1980s, new ground was broken on Christian-Muslim relations during this period, partially spurred on by Fernand Braudel's book *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, which called attention to the relations between "the West" and Islam during this period and challenged the traditional notion of a divided "west versus the rest."⁴ Ellen G. Friedman's research challenged the veracity of the early modern Europeans' belief that captivity in North Africa was exceptionally arduous and the Muslims were particularly cruel enslavers, much harsher than enslavers in Europe, by demonstrating that while the conditions aboard the galley ships and in the mines were indeed brutal, they were not unique to North Africa. Many Muslim captives in Europe reported similar situations, and "no evidence that, as a rule, [captives] were subjected to deliberate, purposeless physical brutality."⁵ She argued that in many ways, Christian enslaved people could experience better conditions in Algiers than their Muslim contemporaries in Europe, as many enslaved Europeans were given work in domestic settings or specialized vocations. This meant they were taken better care of and not subject to the lash, and if they proved exceptionally talented, they could receive special privileges.⁶ Another contribution to the study of the Barbary Coast during these decades, though not specifically of captive narratives, was J. F. P. Hopkins's *Letters From Barbary 1576-1774*, a collection of translated Arabic and Turkish correspondence to England from the North African rulers. These letters demonstrated how the governments of England, Morocco, and the North African city-states negotiated for the return of captives, especially in the case of Ahmad al-Mansur, Sultan of Morocco, who tried to establish respectful relations with Queen Elizabeth I.⁷ However, as far as discourse on the topic, things began to slow down during the 1980s, and it would not be until the twenty-first century that scholarship would start to pick up again substantially.

After September 11, 2001, there began a resurgence in studying these narratives, whether it be fueled by Islamophobia or countermeasures against it, and the discussion of the Barbary Coast and Christian-Muslim relations grew toxic. US politicians invoked the Barbary corsairs in their justifications for the War on Terror, and soon historians such as Robert C. Davis would produce works like *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters: White Slavery*, bringing Islamophobia and the "west versus the rest" conflict back to the forefront of the discussion on the Barbary Coast. This association with the past became further exacerbated by the hostage events of the *Maersk Alabama* and Captain Richard Phillips, where the Barbary corsairs were now being hailed as the predecessors of the Somali pirates in this war between east and west.⁸ Captive narratives were once again used to stir up Islamophobic perceptions, and historians began to dispel these perceptions, such as Gillian Weiss, in her work *Captives and Corsairs: France and Slavery in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, using France's

⁴ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II, Volume II* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 798-802.

⁵ Ellen G. Friedman, "Christian Captives at 'Hard Labor' in Algiers, 16th-18th Centuries," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 13, no. 4 (1980): 616-632 at pp. 619-622, p. 626.

⁶ Friedman, "Christian Captives," pp. 623-24.

⁷ J. F. P. Hopkins, *Letters from Barbary 1576-1774* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 1, pp. 7-8.

⁸ Adrian Tinniswood, *Pirates of Barbary: Corsairs, Conquests, and Captivity in the 17th-Century Mediterranean* (New York: Penguin Group, 2010), pp. xviii-xx.

involvement in North Africa to give a more nuanced view of Christian-Muslim relations during this period.⁹ Nabil Matar goes a step further in his reexamining of history, addressing what he sees as a seriously egregious error on the part of Western historians. Due to the obsession with the violence against Christian Europeans by Muslim corsairs in the west as their possessive nature of a *mare nostrum*, early modern Muslim captivity narratives have been virtually erased from memory, and it is this that contributes to the Islamophobic associations of Barbary corsairs and modern-day terrorists and Somali pirates.¹⁰ My research is more akin to that of Matar and Weiss, seeking to understand better Christian-Muslim relations rather than to compare the Barbary corsairs to modern-day Muslim extremists or Somali pirates. I am fascinated with the cultural contact historians like Braudel and Friedman observed. To better understand this, the captivity narratives of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries will be the best place to start.

European captivity in North Africa had occurred since at least the thirteenth century, especially as a result of the *Reconquista* in Spain, where Muslims were being forced out of the Iberian Peninsula for several centuries. However, the phenomenon began to take off during the early modern period due to the rapid expansion of the Ottoman Empire, the formation of the North African city-states, and the rising strength of the Sultanate of Morocco under Ahmad al-Mansur.¹¹ The Barbary Coast, the term used to describe the North African semi-autonomous city-states of Algiers, Tripoli, and Tunis and the independent Sultanate of Morocco, was where the majority of European Christian captives wound up in slavery, the majority taken at sea by the Barbary corsairs, privateers of the Ottoman Empire primarily stationed out of these North African city-states.¹² The Spanish Crown, following a violent invasion after the success of the Reconquista in 1492, had controlled this region. Still, after the death of Ferdinand II in 1516, these states rebelled, and the Barbarossa brothers, corsairs for the Ottoman Empire, reclaimed the territory and established the city of Algiers.¹³ Of the hundreds of thousands who were captured between the years 1530 and 1780, it is estimated that only about five percent were able to regain their freedom and return to Europe.¹⁴ These captured Europeans were often Spanish, Portuguese, French, or Italian because of their proximity to North Africa. Still, many others were captured, including the Dutch, English, and Icelanders. Those set free were often liberated by their families, governments, or redemptionist

⁹ Gillian Weiss, *Captives and Corsairs: France and Slavery in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 3.

¹⁰ Nabil Matar, *Mediterranean Captivity Through Arab Eyes, 1517-1798* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2021), p. 8; Nabil Matar, “Two Arabic accounts of captivity in Malta: Texts and contexts” in *Piracy and Captivity in the Mediterranean 1550-1810*, ed. Mario Klarner (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 258-274 at p. 258.

¹¹ Peter Mark, “‘Free, unfree, captive, slave’: António de Saldanha, a late sixteenth-century captive in Marrakesh” in *Piracy and Captivity in the Mediterranean 1550-1810*, ed. Mario Klarner (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 99; Maria Antonia Garces, *Cervantes in Algiers: A Captive’s Tale* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002), pp. 19-20.

¹² Mario Klarner ed., *Piracy and Captivity in the Mediterranean 1550-1810* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 1.

¹³ Antonio de Sosa, *Topography of Algiers*, ed. Maria Antonia Garces and trans. Diana de Armas Wilson (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011 [1612]), p. 102.

¹⁴ Mark, “Free unfree,” p. 100.

Christian organizations, both Catholic and Protestant. Catholics, though, often had orders dedicated to achieving this liberation, such as the Lazarists, Trinitarians, and Mercedarians. However, there are accounts of those who could free themselves by escaping.¹⁵ The writings that came out of these captives, historical, autobiographical, or fictional, are the foundation of our understanding of this period and will prove to be the foundation for recognizing the cultural exchange that occurred.

Spain and Portugal's relationship with the North African states was a particularly tenuous one, and some of the earliest detailed captivity narratives come from the Spanish and Portuguese. These accounts were almost entirely negative, demonizing the Muslim captors. Yet, many still bore evidence that the captives had an intense curiosity for the culture and society they found in North Africa. One example of this tendency is Doctor Antonio de Sosa's *Topography of Algiers*, which epitomizes both this demonization and curiosity. Sosa was a Portuguese cleric who lived in captivity in Algiers between 1577 and 1581. During his time, he wrote extensively about his surroundings in what would later be published in 1612 as a three-volume collection called the *Topography and General History of Algiers*, of which the *Topography of Algiers* was the first.¹⁶ Within the *Topography*, Sosa relates a great deal of information about the city of Algiers, from the social hierarchy to the people's cultural practices, observing the elements of their society with great detail. For example, he discusses the methods and domestic work of women in Algiers with fascination. Sosa notes the social and ceremonial nature of childbirth to the North Africans and the active nature women take in the community. Daily activities include visiting the local chapels, tombs, and farms with their children and attending parties and other social events with their neighbors.¹⁷ Sosa acknowledges that during his time, there were many works in circulation discussing the customs of Muslims, so his goal in these sections of the *Topography* was to examine the traditions of the Algerians "beyond what Muhammad commands."¹⁸ His work is a significant breakthrough in understanding Christian-Muslim relations and Algerian society during the late sixteenth century. Few writers before or since go into the same detail Sosa does.

Despite Sosa's curiosity about Algiers and the thorough account this curiosity produced, he makes it clear throughout that he despises the people of Algiers and Muslims as a whole. However, Sosa does so in conflicting and contrary ways, showing his understanding of their culture. Sosa calls the Ottoman Turks who immigrated to Algiers "the vilest of people, stupid and villainous, and for this reason, the Turks call them jackals." However, even in this critique, he concedes that some still manage to be moral, upright men.¹⁹ He also disrespects the Qur'an harshly, saying it "consists of an infinite number of tall stories that Muhammad dreamed up, all contrary to good doctrine and repugnant to reason and to all philosophy and science." Yet, he later goes on to discuss the merits of Islam from the standpoint of devotion.²⁰ When describing the *marabouts*, highly respected religious figures in North African Muslim communities, Sosa says they are "highly ignorant" and, in some

¹⁵ G. N. Clark, "The Barbary Corsairs in the Seventeenth Century," *Cambridge Historical Journal* 8, no. 1 (1944), p. 23; Friedman, "Christian Captives," p. 617.

¹⁶ Garces, *Cervantes in Algiers*, p. 2.

¹⁷ Sosa, *Topography*, pp. 194-5, pp. 203-6.

¹⁸ Sosa, *Topography*, p. 216.

¹⁹ Sosa, *Topography*, p. 124.

²⁰ Sosa, *Topography*, p. 176.

extreme cases, public rapists. On how they pray, he says they repeat the prayers so many times and with such speed that “they drool all over their chests. And, in the end, their brains are fried, and they fall to the ground like dead men. And these same men are taken for the greatest of saints.”²¹ However, in the following passage, Sosa commends them for their devotion, charity, and kindness, despite their “blindness” and “bestial” lives.²² Sosa was particularly harsh in his criticism of sexuality and sexual deviancy in Algiers. Though the public raping by the *marabouts* was despicable in his eyes, he was explicitly disgusted by the “wickedness of sodomy” that he believed may have caused the diabolic renegades, or Christian converts to Islam,²³ to forsake their religion. Nevertheless, he still defends them in their “youthful ignorance.”²⁴ Still, Sosa demonstrates some respect for the Algerians and Turks, dedicating a portion of his account to tell of the virtues of the “Moors,” and even says that Christians could adopt some of these virtues.²⁵ He admires their cleanliness and companionship and their refusal to blaspheme, gamble, speak ill of the sultan or religious figures, or duel one another.²⁶ Sosa’s relationship with the culture and society of Algiers is complicated and may be informed by the popular beliefs about Islam at the time, which poised Islam as a farce and the antithesis of Christianity. This ideology permeates Sosa’s work, making it difficult to determine precisely what Sosa saw as valuable in North African society. Many of the things Sosa notes may have been appealing to him. While he could not explicitly state this for fear of offending his patrons and rulers, his inclusion of these details suggests the possibility that Sosa was internalizing and benefiting from his experiences in Algiers.

During the same period that Sosa was a hostage, a companion of his and one of the most famous Spanish authors of the early modern period was also enduring captivity in Algiers: Miguel de Cervantes. Cervantes was captive in Algiers between 1575 and 1580 before his ransom was paid, and he could return home to Spain. Unlike Sosa, who wrote an extensive autobiographical and historical account of Algiers, even including a biography of Cervantes in his *Dialogue of the Algerian Martyrs*, Cervantes chose to express his ordeal in fictional literature.²⁷ Cervantes wrote multiple works inspired by his time in Algiers, including *La Galatea*, *Life in Algiers*, *The Dungeons of Algiers*, and what is widely known as “The Captive’s Tale,” three chapters found within his major work *Don Quixote*.²⁸ The latter account tells of a young sailor, narrating his tale to Don Quixote in a tavern, who sailed throughout the Mediterranean before being captured by corsairs and forced to work as a galley rower. The sailor tells of the harsh cruelty of his captors, his life in the *baños* (bath houses) of Algiers, and his eventual escape from captivity.²⁹ “The Captive’s Tale” focuses heavily on the suffering

²¹ Sosa, *Topography*, p. 177.

²² Sosa, *Topography*, pp. 178-180.

²³ This can be pejoratively referred to as “turning Turk,” especially for those renegades who became corsairs after their conversion.

²⁴ Sosa, *Topography*, p. 125.

²⁵ Sosa, *Topography*, p. 244.

²⁶ Sosa, *Topography*, pp. 244-245.

²⁷ Garces, *Cervantes in Algiers*, pp. 66-68.

²⁸ Garces, *Cervantes in Algiers*, pp. 1-3.

²⁹ Miguel de Cervantes, *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote de la Mancha*, trans. Peter Motteux (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), pp. 334-340.

captives faced in Algiers, focusing on the traumatic events that Cervantes likely witnessed during his time in Algiers, and is also reflected in Sosa's *Topography*.³⁰ The young sailor says of his experience, "nothing gave us such Affliction, as to hear and see the excessive Cruelties with which our Master us'd the other Christian Slaves," and that he witnessed Christians being hanged, impaled, mutilated, and beaten for the Turks' pleasure, as they were "naturally an Enemy of Mankind."³¹ Much like Sosa, Cervantes takes a strictly negative stance against the Turks, dehumanizing them as ruthless, two-dimensional villains for his literature. Cervantes makes it clear that he holds no sympathies for the corsairs and emphasizes that they are cruel masters, a reflection of his own traumas he must have experienced during his five years of captivity.

These depictions are contrasted, however, with those of other Muslim characters within the text, specifically the *renegados* or renegades. When the captives are presented with a note written in Arabic along with forty Spanish gold crowns, the young sailor enlists the help of one of these renegades. The renegade, he says, "had shewn me great Proofs of his Kindness" because those renegades who sought to escape and return to their homes needed the writing of an enslaved Christian to serve as an affidavit to prove he was "an honest Man and has always been kind to the Christians."³² The writer of the note is also revealed to be Muslim, an unmarried woman named Zoraida who seeks to convert to Christianity as she has been visited by *Lela Marien*, or Our Lady Mary, who has inspired Zoraida to escape Algiers and convert.³³ The narrative switches gears from there forward and becomes a romantic tale of escape, in which Zoraida helps the captives in the nearby *baños* to escape. Though Cervantes does not offer much in the way of tolerance of Muslims, he does examine interesting elements of cultural contact through these two repentant Muslims. The renegade is given a sympathetic image, as despite his being called a sinner, Cervantes portrays him as a good man who ultimately assists the enslaved Christians achieve their freedom and decides to redeem himself before the inquisition. He represents the thousands of Europeans who, from the European perspective, lost hope in returning to their homelands and converted to Islam to preserve themselves. While Cervantes holds his reservations with these people, as converting to Islam is an egregious sin, he is willing to accept them back so long as they repent and reconvert, and he shows no disrespect for their adoption of the culture of Algiers. The same goes for Zoraida, who fits the archetype of a Muslim who chooses to convert to Christianity. Once again, Cervantes does not disparage her ethnic and cultural background as long as she embraces the "true religion" of Christianity. Since Cervantes uses Zoraida as a romantic interest for the captive, it is unclear if this openness to Muslims converting to Christianity and being accepted into Christian society was limited to women. However, given the Spanish Empire's passionate attempts at converting North Africans during their conquest following the *Reconquista*, Cervantes likely was open to and welcoming Muslim converts to Christianity in whatever form this took.³⁴ This is by no means a tolerant view, perhaps even less so than Sosa's account, and we cannot neglect how Cervantes demonizes the vast majority of the Muslims in his works. Still, the cultural influences of North African society he

³⁰ Sosa, *Topography*, p. 157.

³¹ Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, p. 340.

³² Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, p. 342.

³³ Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, pp. 343-7.

³⁴ Garces, *Cervantes in Algiers*, pp. 19-20.

learned from his captivity have crept into literature.

Not all of the Spanish and Portuguese accounts that came out of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were so demonizing of the Muslims. In Mario Klarer's edited *Piracy and Captivity in the Mediterranean 1550-1810*, Peter Mark discusses the account of the Portuguese Antonio de Saldanha, whose narrative was unique and relevant due to its "generally positive tone toward the Sultan [Ahmad al-Mansur]" even after fourteen years of captivity.³⁵ Saldanha was a contemporary of Sosa and Cervantes, captured in 1578, but rather than being taken to Algiers, he was taken to Marrakesh, Morocco. Further, his experience was vastly different from most other Spaniards and Portuguese due to his elevated social status.³⁶ Unlike Saldanha's peers, he had a much closer relationship, one of professionalism and respect, with his master al-Mansur. He observed much more tolerance among Muslims towards Christian captives. Mark even goes so far as to argue that North African Muslim societies allowed for a more comfortable life with more opportunities for social promotion than those on the opposite shores of the Mediterranean.³⁷ This is mainly due to al-Mansur's desire to modernize the sultanate and build its industry to match that of the Ottoman Empire, the Kingdom of Portugal, and other major European powers of the era, whom al-Mansur tried to emulate. Saldanha's account of his captivity in Marrakesh, entitled *Cronica de Almançor Sultão de Marrocos*, observes how al-Mansur was a brilliant, diplomatic leader and tolerant of his Christian subjects and captives, primarily artisans from England, France, or the Netherlands. These captives lived privileged lives, being allowed daily mass in their secluded and protected community (called a *prisão*) and even being encouraged to cultivate their own vineyards and olive groves, of which they could reap the benefits.³⁸ Ellen G. Friedman confirms that this practice of allowing captives to worship at mass and placing them in protected communities, called *baños*, also occurred in Algiers, the same place Cervantes describes in *Don Quixote*.³⁹ It should be recognized that these captives were by no means free, though they could theoretically "turn Turk" at any point and raise their social status. We know from Cervantes and later English accounts like Joseph Pitts that this did not always allow captives to emancipate themselves.⁴⁰ Still, the toleration Saldanha observed in al-Mansur's court, when compared with the accounts of Sosa and Cervantes, paints a more nuanced and complex image of what life was like on the Barbary Coast and the degree to which cultural contact influenced Europeans, as well as how Europeans influenced Muslims like al-Mansur.

Following the turn of the seventeenth century, anti-Muslim sentiments were far from being quelled in Western Europe. They were expanding to new frontiers far beyond the shores of the Mediterranean. In 1627, corsairs from Algiers and Salé invaded Iceland, at the time a possession of the Kingdom of Denmark, to acquire enslaved people, some of whom could be used for ransom. Among these captives was the Reverend Ólafur Egilsson, a Lutheran minister who was captured along with his family. However, he was quickly released to negotiate a ransom for his fellow

³⁵ Mark, "Free, unfree," p. 100.

³⁶ Mark, "Free, unfree," p. 101.

³⁷ Mark, "Free, unfree," p. 101.

³⁸ Mark, "Free, unfree," p.105.

³⁹ Ellen G. Friedman, *Spanish Captives in North Africa in the Early Modern Age* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), pp.60-81.

⁴⁰ Pitts, *A Faithful Account*, p. 182.

captives.⁴¹ Egilsson resided in the Westman Islands, and he portrays himself as a very pious and well-educated man, frequently citing scripture, continuously showing reverence to God as he relates his account, and at one point, he even implies he can speak German.⁴² In a typical Protestant manner for the period, Egilsson is exceptionally concerned with his salvation and believes that the tribulations he is undergoing are meant to be a punishment or a test for him to draw nearer to God; he writes that “everything happens as the Lord wants, when we are judged, then are we punished by God, so that we are not lost eternally.”⁴³ In Protestant captive narratives throughout the early modern period, “the personal core of these narratives is nearly always a justification of the captives’ Protestant beliefs, and an apologia explaining how the captives’ faith remained intact despite the many trials and tribulations they had to face at the hands of their masters,” and Egilsson’s account follows this trend.⁴⁴ Rather than internalizing the experience of his captivity in Algiers as an opportunity to improve his piety by modelling it after the Muslims, which Sosa seems to have done, Egilsson views the experience as a punishment meant to test his piety and loyalty to God, in whom Egilsson never loses faith. In this way, Egilsson learned very little about Muslim society during his time in captivity compared to Sosa or Saldanha, which can also be attributed to his brief stay in Algiers. His narrative provides an alternative perspective on the experience of captivity. Though we find that Egilsson despises his captors just as much as Sosa and Cervantes, he has a unique cognizance of them that is crucial to understanding the evolution of Christian-Muslim relations in captivity narratives.

As already stated, *The Travels of Reverend Ólafur Egilsson* is consistent with captivity narratives of other Europeans in its expression of utter resentment of the Turks and Algerians, whom Egilsson finds despicable. Egilsson repeatedly refers to the Turks as the “evil pirates” and even calls them the “servants of Satan.”⁴⁵ Though God is testing his faith, the corsairs ultimately take him from his homeland and subjugate his wife and children to slavery in Algiers. Egilsson views the community in Algiers as full of sin, observing that “many there are who look fair and embellish themselves in order to better carry through their evil business, as David says. Whatever happens, we are the Lord’s.”⁴⁶ This concern with the appearance and extravagance of the North Africans is not shared by Sosa, who admires their cleanliness, dress, and culture. Still, these things emerge as prideful and vain for someone as religiously minded as Reverend Egilsson. Egilsson also found the renegades to be

⁴¹ Ólafur Egilsson, *The Travels of Reverend Ólafur Egilsson*, ed. and trans. Karl Smári Hreinsson and Adam Nichols (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016 [1628], p. 42, p. 82.

⁴² Egilsson, *The Travels of Reverend* p. 15.

⁴³ Matar, *Mediterranean Captivity*, p. 51; Egilsson, *The Travels of Reverend* p. 13.

⁴⁴ Paul Auchterlonie, *Encountering Islam: Joseph Pitts: An English Slave in 17th century Algiers and Mecca* (London: Arabian Publishing, 2012), p. 73.

⁴⁵ Several sources refer to the “pirates” or “rovers” as the ones who captured them, but in almost every case, these so-called pirates are in fact the Barbary corsairs, professional privateers. Still, the actions between these corsairs and actual pirates were very similar, making it difficult to distinguish, and for the captives, making the distinction would have been the least of their concerns. See W. R. Owens, “Defoe, Robinson Crusoe, and the Barbary Pirates,” *Journal of the English Association* 62, no. 236 (Spring 2013): 51–66 at 53; Egilsson, *The Travels of Reverend*, p. 8.

⁴⁶ Egilsson, *The Travels of Reverend* p. 36.

the cruelest of the Turks, unlike Cervantes and Sosa, who believed the natural-born Turks were the vilest.⁴⁷ Despite these minor differences, the general sentiment of hatred remained, even across the significant religious and ethnic divides between the Catholic Iberians and the Lutheran Scandinavians.

Even though this animosity defines Egilsson's account of the corsairs, he could still find humanity in the Muslims he encountered. However, he does so in a way that is unlike his Iberian predecessors. Cervantes's narrative only sympathizes with the renegades. It converts his fictional captive encounters, with the rest being nothing more than antagonists. Sosa describes the humanity of the North Africans in terms of the virtues that he admires, still viewing them as a definitive "other." Egilsson, similar to Cervantes, paints a very two-dimensional image of the pirates, but in two crucial instances, he acknowledges that despite their cartoonish villainy, they are people. When Egilsson's wife was suffering through childbirth aboard the ship carrying them to Algiers, the pirates helped care for the mother and child, giving them their shirts to keep the newborn.⁴⁸ Despite the violence Egilsson witnessed when the corsairs sacked his home, he does not deny that his family and friends were treated with a degree of hospitality during his time with them. However, the most interesting way in which Egilsson recognizes the basic humanity of his captors is in describing what they look and behave like, giving a very candid response:

Truly speaking, they are like other people: different in size and look, some small, some large, some black. Some are not of Turkish origin at all, but are Christian people of other countries such as England, Germany, Denmark, or Norway...in truth, they [the Turks] are not a wicked looking people. Rather, they are quiet and well-tempered in their manner.⁴⁹

These may not seem very tolerant-minded or even revolutionary, but this was a crucial distinction. Rather than measure the humanity of the corsairs in terms of "Christian-ness" or European concepts of virtue, Egilsson grants his enemies basic equality. Though he sees them as evil people, utterly deplorable and full of sin, he still recognizes them as people diverse in appearance, ethnicity, and ideology. This sort of recognition will continue by future authors like Joseph Pitts. While Egilsson deviates little from earlier captive narratives in how he views the corsairs, his perspective will characterize a growing apprehension of the corsairs, Muslims, and North Africans that was emerging.

In the latter half of the seventeenth century, the captive narrative genre grew in popularity. One narrative from this period came from Germain Mouette, a Frenchman from a town near Chartres, captured by the corsairs in 1670 at 19. Mouette gave a harrowing account of the brutality during his eleven years as a captive in Salé, one of Morocco's major cities, as he witnessed a great deal of violence and suffering at the hands of the Sultan of Morocco and the enslavers. Mouette's account, titled *The Travels of the Sieur Mouette, In the Kingdoms of Fez and Morocco During his Eleven Years Captivity in those Parts*, tells of captives being subjected to backbreaking labor, primarily backbreaking construction projects. At the same time, he and the other enslaved people were poorly fed and

⁴⁷ Egilsson, *The Travels of Reverend* p. 18-19.

⁴⁸ Egilsson, *The Travels of Reverend* p. 22.

⁴⁹ Egilsson, *The Travels of Reverend* p. 18.

constantly beaten.⁵⁰ However, it was likely even more distressing for Mouette to witness the sadistic violence against his fellow captives. Mouette watched many men get abused, seeing a man beaten and butchered to death before being fed to dogs. On another occasion, a man was thrown into the lions' den as punishment after refusing to convert to Islam (miraculously, the man was not eaten).⁵¹ Mouette observed that the Sultan was a fierce leader, who, due to the disrespect of a Genoese pirate, swore he "would never give Liberty to any Christian, for any Price whatsoever," and that the mere sight of the man made him quake.⁵² The tribulations Mouette experienced were harsh, a far departure from the experience of Saldanha in Morocco less than a century earlier, but not all of his contemporary captives shared the same suffering. Claude Auxcousteaux de Fercourt, a nobleman from Paris, captured around the same time as Mouette, acknowledged that though his experience as an enslaved person was one of hardship and brutality, this was not the case for all of his peers. He commented that "not all slaves meet as unhappy a fate as ours; those lucky to fall into the hands of a true Muslim or natural Turk suffer only insofar as they have lost their liberty."⁵³ These generous masters would comfort the enslaved by reminding them of the temporary nature of their stay, assuring them not to worry for "God is great, the world so-so; God will lead the way; an occasion will arrive for you to return home."⁵⁴ For some Protestants, the persecution they faced in Europe was much more frightening than the prospect of captivity on the Barbary Coast. In a sermon to some members of his community, one pastor from the Netherlands who had returned from North Africa confirmed as much; "several among you [who] were captives in Barbary,' he observed in 1686, 'know by experience that Barbary is humane in comparison to our ungrateful homeland' and Muslims are 'lambs' as compared to lupine Catholics."⁵⁵ These sorts of acknowledgments of kindhearted, generous Muslims are rare to find in accounts such as Mouette's due to the hardship he faced, which naturally informed his opinion of the religion and society of the North Africans. Even still, he decided to write about the culture of the Moroccans and Islam, but he is exceedingly irreverent, likely due to his harsh treatment.

Mouette's account is unique in that he is one of the first captives to dedicate a significant portion of his narrative to discuss the tenets of the Muslim faith and Moroccan society. Sosa had claimed there were many texts available to his audience on the topic of Islam, and while Paul Auchterlonie observes that knowledge had improved since the medieval era, he also notes that "it is remarkable how little was known about the history, beliefs, structures and practices of Islam during this period."⁵⁶ In light of this, it is quite extraordinary that Mouette wrote about these beliefs and practices in his narrative during this period. *The Travels of the Sieur Monette* cover many elements of

⁵⁰ Germain Mouette, *The Travels of the Sieur Mouette, In the Kingdoms of Fez and Morocco During his Eleven Years Captivity in those Parts* (London: J. Knapton, A. Bell, D. Midwinter, and W. Taylor, 1710), pp. 23-30.

⁵¹ Mouette, *The Travels of the Sieur* p. 17, pp. 34-6.

⁵² Mouette, *The Travels of the Sieur* p. 17, p. 24.

⁵³ Weiss, *Captives and Corsairs*, p. 68.

⁵⁴ Weiss, *Captives and Corsairs*, p. 68.

⁵⁵ Gillian Weiss, "A Huguenot captive in 'Uthman Dey's court: Histoire chronologique du royaume de Tripoly (1685) and its author" in *Piracy and Captivity in the Mediterranean 1550-1810*, ed. Mario Klarner (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 245.

⁵⁶ Auchterlonie, *Encountering Islam*, p. 89.

Islam accurately, including the Five Principal Articles of Faith, the religious holidays and sabbath day, and their ban on gambling.⁵⁷ However, most of what Mouette writes is reproof, disrespectful, and in some cases, blatantly incorrect, leaving little room for nuance or tolerance. Much like Sosa describes the *marabouts* as uneducated fools, Mouette recounts that the Qur'an states that "all Idiots and half-witted Person be look'd upon as Saints, which is religiously observ'd, and they are Canoniz'd whilst living."⁵⁸ The fact that Mouette wrote an account of Muslim beliefs demonstrates an understanding of Islam that previous authors did not. Still, it cannot be taken as accurate or genuine, as it is rife with critiques and inaccuracies. Mouette also seems to find the "Moorish" women particularly attractive, not unlike Sosa, who goes on at length about their fashion in his *Topography*.⁵⁹ Rather than end there, Mouette goes on to develop a portrayal of the women as seductresses while he and some of his Christian comrades nobly resist these temptations. He says that the enslaver's wives were very fond of the enslaved Christians, as their husbands (as part of the Muslim faith) were circumcised, while the Christians were not, and these women would "use all Arts to gain the Affections of their own Slaves."⁶⁰ In some ways, Mouette's account is a regression, reaffirming the fears of Europeans about the barbaric practices of Muslims and the cruelty experienced by Europeans in North Africa. Nevertheless, Mouette still has his place in the study of Christian-Muslim relations during this period and still exhibits some literacy on Islam and Muslim ways of life.

Just before Mouette's account was published in English for the first time, Joseph Pitts had published *A Faithful Account* describing his experience in Algiers and Mecca. His work is perhaps the most genuine and comprehensive account by a European about Islam and North African society published during the early eighteenth century, if not the early modern period as a whole. Pitts was from Exeter in County Devon, one of the wealthiest port cities in England during the early modern period, making it no surprise that he chose to become a sailor at a young age.⁶¹ County Devon was also one of England's most fiercely Protestant regions, and Pitts was raised as a Presbyterian.⁶² This upbringing would inform how Pitts prefaced his account, which like Egilsson, is focused on justifying his faith and his adherence to Christianity, even though Pitts forcibly converted to Islam due to the "barbarous Cruelty" of his first master, whom he despised.⁶³ Pitts's *A Faithful Account*, written about ten years after his return to England, is characterized by his desire to reconcile his time as an apostate. Despite his rejection of Islam as "false worship" and his sour disposition towards the Turks and Algerians, Pitts's account may be considered to be not entirely one of propaganda. In fact, it is the most accurate, neutral account of the Muslim faith of all the captive narratives treated here and gives the most sympathetic view of North African people and their customs. This makes Pitts's work the most valuable source of genuine understanding and tolerance that came out of piracy in the

⁵⁷ Mouette, *The Travels of the Sieur* p. 77-89.

⁵⁸ Mouette, *The Travels of the Sieur*, p. 89.

⁵⁹ Mouette, *The Travels of the Sieur*, p. 95; Sosa, *Topography*, pp. 198-202.

⁶⁰ Mouette, *The Travels of the Sieur* p. 96.

⁶¹ Auchterlonie, *Encountering Islam*, pp. 66-7.

⁶² Auchterlonie, *Encountering Islam*, pp. 67-8.

⁶³ Pitts, *A Faithful Account*, p. 183.

Mediterranean during the early modern period. It demonstrates the changes made since the earliest accounts in the sixteenth century.

In the same way that Mouette discussed the beliefs of Muslims in his account, Pitts writes extensively about Muslim traditions, religious beliefs, and holy sites. However, his narrative is much more accurate and less condescending than Mouette's. This is likely due to Pitts's conversion, which no other author examined here had undergone. Even after his conversion to Christianity, Pitts tries to give as honest and direct an account of Islam as possible without the judgments found in Mouette's version. On the topic of the divinity of Jesus Christ in the Muslim tradition, Pitts tries to correct misunderstandings he saw being perpetrated by other writers; he remarks that "'tis true, they own Christ to be a great Prophet, and born of the Virgin Mary...but they never own him to be the Son of God, (as some have related) or acknowledge his Doctrine as the last will and Word of God."⁶⁴ This is a direct contradiction of Mouette's account of the Muslim stance on Christ, as he says the Muslims call Christ *Robo Alla*, or Son of God.⁶⁵ Pitts also dispels certain rumors about the Muslims, such as the myth that many of them take many wives, to which Pitts responds that "there is not one in a thousand hath more than one, except it be in the country, where some here and there may have two."⁶⁶ He also contradicts the myth that when turning Turk, renegades throw a dart at an image of Jesus Christ, saying that those who furnish this myth "deceive the World."⁶⁷ In relating this information, Pitts does not come across as contemptuous or intolerant like the previous accounts of Islamic practices such as Mouette's, but instead shows erudition and a degree of tolerance in his narrative, far surpassing any that could be seen in previous authors' works. However, this is not to say that Pitts cannot compare with those who came before him. The internalization of his experience in North Africa and the Near East was similar to Sosa's curiosity and desire for knowledge of the culture. He views his time in Algiers as a learning opportunity. In the preface to *A Faithful Account*, Pitts laments:

It is a shame, indeed, to Christians to take a View of Zeal of those poor blind *Mahometans*...If they are so zealous in their false worship, it must needs be a Reprimand to Christians, who are so remiss in the True. And I pray God they may take the Hint, and learn thereby to bless the Goodness of God, that he hath continued his Gospel to them, while such a vast part of the Globe is devoted to a vile and debauch'd Imposter.⁶⁸

A similar sentiment about the lessons that could be learned from the Muslims' piety can be found in Sosa's *Topography*. One of the virtues Sosa describes is devotion, observing that "He who finally determines to live like a good Muslim is indeed a devout one...observant of the Law and as devout in making the salat at the proper hours, attending the mosques when required, fasting, and abstaining from wine and liquor. Christians, God willing, should be as devout in their holy observances of the precepts of God."⁶⁹ Both Sosa and Pitts value this devotion shown by the

⁶⁴ Pitts, *A Faithful Account*, p. 73.

⁶⁵ Mouette, *The Travels of Sieur*, p. 77.

⁶⁶ Pitts, *A Faithful Account*, p. 39.

⁶⁷ Pitts, *A Faithful Account*, p. 199.

⁶⁸ Pitts, *A Faithful Account*, p. xii.

⁶⁹ Sosa, *Topography*, p. 246.

Muslim people and see it as an opportunity for Christians to learn and grow from it. Pitts differs from Sosa, however, in that he shows pity towards Muslims that they are so blind that they have been led astray in their faith (at least in his mind). In contrast, Sosa merely admires the devotion while still rejecting any notion of sympathy for them. Pitts stands apart from these previous authors in that he both admires some of their qualities and ways but also respects their humanity in a manner not even Egilsson could, taking pity on them in their misguided worship of a false prophet. Pitts has an understanding of Islam that is greater than nearly every European who was fortunate enough to return home from the Barbary Coast and gives an account of Islam that has more validity and accuracy than almost all other accounts in early modern English history.⁷⁰

While it is much more challenging to determine what the positive influences of a life in captivity were for the likes of Sosa, Cervantes, Egilsson, or Mouette (if there were any at all), it is evident that Pitts did indeed benefit from his time under his third *Patroon*, or master. As Friedman notes, enslaved people in Algiers could elevate their status through specialization in their work, and Pitts acknowledges that he was poised to benefit from this.⁷¹ His third master was a very wealthy and well-educated man who was a relative of the current *Dey*, or king, of Algiers.⁷² As a result, his master wished for Pitts to be well versed in his reading and writing so that one day he might work as a master of writing or as an accountant, which ultimately never came to fruition. Still, Pitts became much more immersed in the culture and society than many of his predecessors, so he struggled to leave Algiers and his master. They had freed Pitts and promised him a substantial inheritance, as “he was like a Father” to him.⁷³ Pitts chalks this struggle up to his being tempted by Satan, which is to say this conflict was a very serious one to him.⁷⁴ It must have been tough for him to abandon his life as a Muslim despite his desire to return to his true father and Christianity. He expresses this dilemma after his father writes to him, which is why he claims he is battling temptation.⁷⁵ No other account under discussion shows this sort of turmoil regarding whether or not to leave North Africa. However, then again, no other account displays the same level of intimacy with the North Africans that Pitts had. Not only had Pitts learned from his experience, but it also shaped him into the author he would become, as there is little evidence that he received any education before this time. While these may not have necessarily been positive experiences for Pitts, they broadened his perspectives. They made him more understanding and sympathetic to people frequently demonized by past writers and contemporaries like Daniel Defoe.

During Pitts’s lifetime, captivity narratives were becoming a much more popular and widely circulated literary genre in England, meaning the English people were well exposed to the Barbary Coast. These narratives were typically “rudimentary, inaccurate, or distorted sources,” and they demonized the violence and brutality of Muslims and North Africans to the point that they became “the strongest and most negative influence on British understanding of Islam and Muslims in the

⁷⁰ Auchterlonie, *Encountering Islam*, p. 102.

⁷¹ Friedman, “Christian Captives,” p. 224.

⁷² Pitts, *A Faithful Account*, p. 225.

⁷³ Pitts, *A Faithful Account*, p. 239.

⁷⁴ This is similar to Egilsson’s belief that his experience was meant to be a test from God, perhaps a sign of shared Protestant values.

⁷⁵ Pitts, *A Faithful Account*, p. 204, p. 238.

early modern period.”⁷⁶ The genre was so popular that Daniel Defoe, writer of the famous novel *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, was able to include Muslim pirates as the antagonists in a brief episode of the titular character’s sea adventures, a natural enemy and threat of which the English were acutely aware and would have found believable.⁷⁷ The fact that Pitts was writing such a tolerant account of the Muslims at the same time as these vilifying works shows that while cultural contact and tolerance were growing, there was still resistance to be found. Most of England and Europe were not receptive to the view Pitts promoted. The expansion of the captivity narrative genre in England may have coincided with texts that showed a growing understanding of Islam. However, like in Spain and France, most works promoted Islamophobia. Toleration and acceptance, especially towards what many believed to be hostile, barbaric, and cursed people, is not something that comes naturally, and even for Pitts, it was challenging to accept. However, there is another side to Defoe’s vilification of the Barbary corsairs that reveals that not all Europeans were motivated by hatred of Islam but instead were concerned with more secular conflict. A shift in captive narratives during this time focused on England extending its imperial territories and potential British occupation of North Africa. In late-seventeenth-century England, “captives started representing themselves as providers of intelligence that would be useful for future British occupation and domination. The nightmare of captivity became the dream of empire.”⁷⁸ In the case of Defoe, W. R. Owens believes that the “dream of empire” manifested itself in Defoe via the dream of a Pan-European invasion force sent to invade Barbary to defend English international trade, which was expanding at the time due to its colonial possessions in North America and the West Indies. Defoe saw Barbary piracy and privateering as enemies of commerce. With the combined efforts of Christendom, he believed a force of “fifty or sixty thousand men” could easily conquer North Africa.⁷⁹ His vision would never come to fruition, but remarkably, Defoe would propose such a move when Europe was deeply divided by religious differences at this point in time. While this crusader-like mindset may have looked past Christian differences, one would expect it to leave little room for toleration of North African Muslims. Yet, Defoe justifies his rationale as not being a matter of religion or ethnicity. Defoe promotes trade between Christians and Muslims so long as they do not engage in piracy. He trivializes the idea of declaring war on North Africa purely based on being “infidels,” as that would result in pointless wars with all “Heathen Nations.”⁸⁰ While this is certainly not the same understanding Pitts’ account of Algiers offers, it demonstrates that captivity narratives could be used not just as an Islamophobic tool but also to justify more secular understandings of the Barbary corsairs. While some Europeans were entirely apprehensive of any form of tolerance towards Muslims, others were able to look past religious differences in Europe and the Muslim world for their secular goals.

Thus far, this paper has primarily focused on how Christian conceptions of Islam and North African culture were informed by European captive narratives to varying degrees of success.

⁷⁶ Owens, “Defoe, Robinson Crusoe,” pp. 55-6.

⁷⁷ Owens, “Defoe, Robinson Crusoe,” p. 57.

⁷⁸ Owens, “Defoe, Robinson Crusoe,” p. 57. See Gerald MacLean and Nabil Matar, *Britain and the Islamic World, 1558–1713* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 126-2.

⁷⁹ Owens, “Defoe, Robinson Crusoe,” pp. 62-4.

⁸⁰ Owens, “Defoe, Robinson Crusoe,” pp. 64-5.

However, there was also evidence from a Muslim perspective that, at least in some regards, Christian-Muslim relations had improved over the centuries outside of Pitts in England. Less than a decade after Pitts wrote *A Faithful Account*, an Egyptian Muslim named Ahmad al-Sayyid was captured by Maltese corsairs on his way home from Sidon in 1713.⁸¹ Not dissimilar to how his Christian contemporaries wrote of the Muslims, al-Sayyid was none too pleased to have been captured at sea, and he wished that God cursed the Knights of Malta for what they had done to him and his family.⁸² However, al-Sayyid describes a very different kind of corsair than in some earlier Muslim accounts. Earlier accounts of the Knights of Malta from the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries describe them as “wicked infidels” who were brutal and cruel to their Muslim captives. Still, in al-Sayyid’s account, the Maltese are hospitable, generous hosts to their captives.⁸³ During al-Sayyid’s stay in Malta, he says

We continued to enjoy his hospitality, I mean the *kbawjā* [slave merchant], until the end of Ramadan, fasting and breaking our fast every night over twelve kinds of succulent foods...On the Ramadan Feast, his wife prepared a grand dinner for us, which she served on about twelve silver plates. This Christian woman hosted us generously.⁸⁴

It is never explained how the Maltese were aware of Muslim customs and religious practices, nor is any reason given for treating their captives with such high respect, especially given their notorious treatment of past Muslims. Mouette also acknowledges that the treatment of Muslims by Christian pirates was much more favorable during his time: “for the Moors, who daily expect either the Christians or the Turks should come into their country, say, they had rather have the Christians, because they are more merciful, and will spare their lives.”⁸⁵ This may not be an entirely accurate statement since Mouette had a particularly negative view of the Turks due to his harsh treatment and would likely make them out as worse than Christian pirates. It seems, though, that he is taking the word of the Moroccans rather than his own when he says this. In any sense, it is clear that the understanding of Islam and Muslim people for Christian corsairs had improved over the past century, at least in the case of the Maltese if Mouette’s word is not to be trusted. This demonstrates that cultural contact in the Mediterranean was successfully creating more tolerance, at least in the case of the Maltese, despite the conditions of captivity that were the likely cause.⁸⁶ Based on al-Sayyid’s account, there is evidence that in at least some cases, there was a level of toleration, understanding, and appreciation shown to the Muslims and their customs that had not been present in years prior, and it coincided with an understanding that had been building in European captive narratives over the centuries.

Over the late sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth centuries, captivity narratives from

⁸¹ Matar, *Mediterranean Captivity*, p. 72.

⁸² Matar, *Mediterranean Captivity*, p. 72.

⁸³ Matar, *Mediterranean Captivity*, p. 63.

⁸⁴ Matar, *Mediterranean Captivity*, p. 73.

⁸⁵ Mouette, *The Travels of the Sieur* p. 8.

⁸⁶ Unfortunately, due to a lack of sources from the Italian Peninsula and surrounding islands translated into English, it was difficult to prove in this paper that this understanding is a direct result of European and Barbary piracy and slavery in the Mediterranean.

enslaved Christians and Muslims in the Mediterranean evidenced and contributed to a growing European cognizance of North African religion and culture. The different perspectives of these writers contributed to this image to varying degrees, with accounts like Egilsson and Cervantes's being much briefer than those of Sosa, Mouette, or Pitts, and some writers may even have negatively impacted views of toleration and understanding of the Barbary Coast. No author, not even the most open-minded of them, wholly embraced the North African way of life or their religion, and none advocated for any equality or peace between Europeans and Muslims. Despite all this, these narratives coincided with a growing awareness of Islam and North African society in Europe. I argue that they were invaluable to developing more tolerant Christian-Muslim relations by the end of the early modern period.