

Cotton Mather, The Barbary Shores and American Exceptionalism



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Abstract

This research seeks to explore the religious, cultural and socio-political dimensions of Mather's Thanksgiving sermon-cum-captivity narrative *The Glory of Goodness ... 1703* and a related pastoral letter, *Letter to the English Captives in Africa*, both of which addressed to American colonial captives in Meknes, Morocco during the last quarter of the seventeenth century. Taking its theoretical bearings from cultural materialism, historicism, and cultural anthropology, it contends that Mather's sermon-captivity and pastoral letter are tentative attempts at the redefinition of a colonial American identity at a time of crisis through the celebration of American Exceptionalism within the Puritan Salvationist theology.

Introduction

“L’histoire des relations entre les Etats-Unis et les Régences Barbaresques commença dès le lendemain de l’indépendance Américaine” (p.7), [*The history of the relations between the United States and the Barbary Regencies started at the wake of American Independence.*] Blondy (2002) has written in his preface to Dupuy's book *Américains et Barbaresques 1776-1824*. As this research will attempt to show, this is not at all the case if one takes into account the history of colonial America. Scholars specialized in American captivity narratives, such as Baepler (1999) argued quite the contrary. Baepler has retraced the history of American captivity back to Joshua Gee, a Bostonian shipwright, whose captivity in Algiers in 1680 was orally evoked by his son also named Joshua from “the pulpit of Boston's North Church,” (p.1) which he eventually came to share it with Cotton Mather. According to Baepler the elder Gee set out from Boston Harbor on a tobacco trading voyage to the Mediterranean when his ship was intercepted by Algerine corsairs, and the crew of which were carried into captivity in Algiers. Once there, he was recruited as a galley slave in the Algerine marine, and thus participated, though unwillingly, in corsair activities before he was redeemed, seemingly as a result of the Anglo-Algerine peace Treaty of 1682. Baepler has reported that Gee owed his redemption to “the famous judge and diarist Samuel Sewall” (p.1).

In retracing the origins of the Barbary American captivity, Baepler has suggested that Gee Senior and after him Gee Junior had taken their cues from Rowlandson (1677). Three years earlier before Gee was captured by the Algerine corsairs, Rowlandson was seized by Indians. She survived her captivity to return home in Boston to recount her story first orally, and then in the form of a book entitled *Sovereignty and the Goodness of God... Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Rowlandson* published in 1682. The suggestion that Gee went on his tobacco trading voyage with Rowlandson's captivity resounding in his brain only to come back from captivity to build on the popularity of Rowlandson's account to circulate his own narrative orally before his son recited it from the pulpit sounds plausible. Indeed, notwithstanding the difference in gender, one can note a similarity of circumstances and family background between the two

captives, which warrants Baepler's suggestion that Rowlandson's story had provided a pretext, or rather an intertext for Gee's. Both of them came from deeply religious families. Rowlandson's husband was a divine and her family was an outstanding family in Boston. The same holds true for the industrious Gee whose son officiated alongside Cotton Mather. So their social status made the divine affliction of their captivity exemplary for the Boston community. The immediate worldly cause of the affliction was also seemingly the same. "Tobacco" in both captivities points to that moral backsliding in the Massachusetts Puritan community to which was imputed their divine punishment through the agency of "Barbarian" aliens whether these were close at home and called Indians, or lived in far-distant Barbary Shores.

Statement of Issue and approach

However, no matter the plausibility of Baepler's claim, this research would contend that Barbary American captivity narratives were not solely an outgrowth of the influence of a homegrown genre, the Indian captivity. As both a colonial American and a subject of the British Crown, Mather (1703) could not have overlooked that substantial British tradition of captivity accounts, a sample of which is given to us in Vitkus's *Piracy, Slavery, and Redemption: Barbary Captivity Narratives from Early Modern England* (2001). So, I would argue that right before American Puritans were seized by Indians in the New World, their British and Puritan ancestor such as John Fox, Richard Haslestone, John Rawlins, and William Okeley had been made captives into alien cultures on the Barbary Shores. So whilst I would agree with Vaughan and Clark (1981) that "Puritans [in America] did not invent the captivity [...and that] it is one of America's oldest literary genres and its most unique" (p.2), one can only bring a caveat to the claim that the New world was the primary and sole location of this culture of captivity. I would sustain instead that American captivity narratives had one of their roots in the Barbary Shores and that the Puritans brought it to the American side of the Atlantic in their cultural baggage alongside Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). It is with reference to this double legacy of captivity narratives that Mather's *The Glory of . The Goodness ...1703* and his epistolary letter entitled *Letter to the English Captives in Africa* need to be looked at in this research.

In a nutshell, this research claims that Puritan culture of captivity and its later avatars were transatlantic cultural phenomena. Whether the captors were Indians or "Barbarians" from the Barbary Shores, American captivities just like British ones function as sensors and reflectors or mirrors of the major social, economic, religious, political, and cultural tensions of the time of their publication. First and foremost, I would argue that if American captivity narratives, whether Indian or Barbary, came to acquire a distinctly American literary identity as a genre, it is primarily because they were essentially concerned with identity formation, particularly at the moments of crisis. Secondly, if, as the case will be made, Mather was heir to a double tradition of captivity narratives, the predominantly male British captivity narratives, and the mostly female gendered accounts of Indian captivity, the intertextual relationships that he came to establish between the two resulted in the feminization of the Barbary captivity that he came to produce in his sermon and pastoral letter. Finally, I would sustain that this feminization of Mather's sermon captivity and

pastoral letter, that I would trace to the influence of Mary Rowlandson, the originator of the Indian captivity accounts, on Mather, was in line with the Puritan ideology which considers every soul to be a captive of universal sin, and whose redemption could ultimately come only from God. In this respect, such Biblical intertexts as the Egyptian and Babylonian captivities were fed by Mather into his sermon-captivity and pastoral letter to give them that peculiar Puritan flavor.

Cotton Mather's Sermon-Captivity and Its Cultural Context of Production

The Glory of Goodness... (1703) is a powerful thanksgiving sermon preached by Mather to a Boston congregation on the occasion of the return of some English captives to Massachusetts Bay colony from captivity in Meknes, Morocco in 1703. This sermon is a captivity narrative told from the third-person point view, and as such shows to what extent captivity is closely linked to devotional literature in Puritan culture across the two sides of the Atlantic. Years earlier, Mather had also written a pastoral letter entitled *Letter to the English Captives, IN AFRICA* to the same American colonials to bolster their morale and religious convictions. For the sake of analysis, Mather's thanksgiving sermon and pastoral letter will be taken as one single biographical document about the captivity of American colonials in Barbary.

Before foregrounding the insights that Mather's *The Glory of Goodness...* and his pastoral letter shed into the distinct Puritan culture of the time, a brief summary of the context in which they were produced is needed to understand what the two documents say about the Puritan mind, culture and identity of late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries New England. As noted by many historians such as Zakai (2002), the Puritan migration to the New World was made with Biblical parallels or types in mind. These types were significantly different from those that were deployed for legitimatizing the Spanish migration and colonization of the Southern parts of the New World as well as the English Protestant settlement of Virginia for that matter. A distinction was made between the Genesis type and Exodus type of religious migrations in ecclesiastical history. The former is linked to God's Promise in the Genesis to his chosen nation to propound the Christian religion worldwide, and provided religious legitimacy for colonization by both Catholic countries (Spain, Portugal and France) and Protestant England notwithstanding their transposition of religious rivalry to the New World. As for the latter, it was patterned on the Israelite captivity in Egypt and the flight across the Red Sea to Canaan as reported in the *Exodus*. It was not meant to transport the prevalent religious home cultures as was the case with the Genesis type, but to create conditions for a flight from Britain (judged as being captive of sin) to the American wilderness to escape the impending judgment of God, and the establishment of free forms of worship denied to them at home, through both a national covenant as well as a covenant of grace (pp. 9-12). Much more will be said about this aspect later.

The history of the migration of the Separatists in Plymouth in 1620 and that of the Puritans in Massachusetts Bay ten years later in 1630 will not be rehashed here. It is enough to point out the fact that religious dissensions soon appeared in these two colonies when religious freedom was reneged by those very people who made it a credo at the start of their emigration.

As a consequence of religious strictures, Roger Williams, a Separatist, who migrated to Massachusetts Bay in 1631, was banished from the colony just four years later for what were then considered as eccentric beliefs. Amongst other ideas, Williams advocated that the church and state be kept separate, that the Puritans then in power could not impose their religious beliefs on other denominations, and that the government had no right to dispossess the Indians of their lands in order to be given to the settlers. The banishment of Roger Williams led eventually to the creation of the colony of Providence. Anne Hutchinson provided another illustrative case of the challenge of the established Puritan orthodoxy in Massachusetts Bay. Initially, she was a follower of John Cotton, a minister most known for his sermons in defense of the Covenant of Grace, in other words a covenant whereby God unconditionally or freely accords salvation to unworthy humans. From a fervent commentator on Cotton's sermon to the womenfolk and later also to men in her home, Hutchinson soon developed her own religious beliefs like the possibility of communicating directly with God, that is without the mediation of the clergy, and the certainty of salvation. In so preaching, she spared the believers that state of constant tension in which the Puritan orthodoxy maintained them. The threat to religious orthodoxy, and hence to social stability by a woman in a world of males was judged by the religious authorities to be too serious to be ignored. As a result, Hutchinson was brought before the General Court of Massachusetts and was sent to exile in what came to be known as Rhode Island in November 1637.

In spite of religious dissent, the New England colonies remained marked by a distinct way of life or character as a geographical region where Puritanism achieved its fullest, least inhibited flowering. This flowering of the New England Way did not happen without crises of growth all through the second half of the seventh century and the first decades of the eighteenth. The expansion of the settlement in New England brought out a collision of interests with the original inhabitants and ensued in Indian wars, most notably King Philip's War (1675-1676) during which, according to Norton et al. (2007), an "estimated one-tenth of the able-bodied adult male population [of Massachusetts Bay colony] was killed and wounded" (pp. 45-46). The abrogation of the charter of the colonies during the Restoration period (1660-1688) and the creation of the Dominion of New England reduced considerably the political autonomy that New England colonies had enjoyed until then. The Navigation Acts (1651, 1663, 1673) followed up by the creation of the Board of Trade in 1696 furthered the mercantilist interests of the mother country at the disadvantage of the colonies. Finally, the emergence of a merchant class on seaboard port towns such as Boston, Newport, and New Haven brought out a social crisis as the old farming interests collided with the emergent commercial interests tied to transatlantic trading system.

Crisis did not spare the established religious way of life as "second-generation Puritans did not display the same religious fervor that had prompted their ancestors to cross the Atlantic" (Norton et al., 1991, pp. 41-2). So, in 1662, a synod was convened in Massachusetts to consider in what ways to accord church membership, until then reserved only for those who had experienced the gift of God's grace, could be accorded to these lukewarm Puritans. The result was the so-called Half-Way Covenant whereby the children of the latter were baptized as "half-way" members in return for their parents' acceptance of the authority of the church and of their exclusion from

communion and participation in voting in church affairs. However, whilst New England reaffirmed its Congregationalism during the 1662 Synod in Massachusetts, the Half-Way Covenant did not put an end the sense of religious crisis around which the other crises referred to earlier coalesced. As Ahlstrom (2004) put it,

Widespread adoption of the Half-Way Covenant solved some important doctrinal uncertainties, but it could hardly be expected to relieve New England's religious ills. Declension" continued uninterrupted, the lamentations of the clergy intensified, and their sermonic jeremiads came to constitute a major literary genre. To the generalized woes of declining piety were added the very material facts of royal Restoration, which brought England's reassertion of governmental authority and the regulation of trade. On top of these developments came other tragedies: an increase of shipwrecks and pestilence, enormous losses of life and property in King Philip's War, and the devastating Boston fires of 1676 and 1679 (p. 160).

To Ahlstrom's list of catastrophes can be added that of captivity of American colonials on Barbary Shores. These catastrophes, as Ahlstrom goes on to add, made the General Court call for a synod on 10 September 1679 to "make a full inquiry ... into the Causes of and State of Gods Controversy with us" (p.160). This synod which came to be known as the "Reformatory Synod" not only investigated into the reasons why God continued to afflict the colonies but prescribed the adequate cures consisting of a "solemn and explicit Renewal of the Covenant" (p. 160).

Results and Discussion

It is in this context of crisis of all sorts, and especially the religious crisis that one has to put Mather's pastoral letter and his sermon *The Goodness of God* for a full understanding of the meaning that he gave to the captivity of the American colonials in Meknes, Morocco. This activity was certainly brought out in the first place by the participation of New England merchants in the transatlantic trade. No indication whatsoever is dropped in the two documents about the circumstances in which the American colonials found themselves in the hands of the Muslim captors of Meknes. But given the principles of the Navigation Acts we can easily guess that they were crewmembers of either English or American colonial merchantmen involved in the international Atlantic trade network. So, the captivity concerns directly or indirectly that growing merchant class, whose open hostility against the Puritan religious leadership for their exclusion from the governing elite led the clergy to "return their hostility in full measure [...by] preaching sermons called jeremiads, lamenting New England's new commercial orientation" (Norton et al., 1991, p. 42).

Norton et al. (1991), like many other scholars, dismissed the ministers, who addressed their jeremiads to the merchant class, as backward looking ministers, who "spoke for the past, not the future, because by the 1670s New England colonies were deeply enmeshed in an intricate international trading network" (p.43). Following Bercovitch's lead (1978), and taking my bearings from Cotton's pastoral letter and *The Goodness of God... (1703)*, I would defend the contrary claim, that ministers like Cotton also "had their gaze on the future" and so their vision was both a

retrospective and a prospective vision. As Bercovitch sustained, “in this sense, there is some justice in Perry Miller’s ironic image of the Old Guard ‘backing into modernity,’ at the end of the seventeenth century, in ‘crablike progress from an ‘aristocratic’ order to a ‘middle-class empirical enterprising’” (p. 27). Cotton’s thanksgiving sermon on the occasion of the release of the American colonials from captivity in Meknes and the pastoral letter that he wrote to them during their captivity offer evidence of the minister’s capacity to yoke together the covenant of grace and temporal blessings.

The pastoral letter to English Captives in Africa and The Goodness of Goodness... (1703) dwell mostly on that optimistic side of the jeremiad that scholars have often overlooked in their analysis of this American literary genre. That Mather wrote to the captives linked to transatlantic trade and those merchants who showed their hostility to the clergy in order to offer his advice and consolation reveals his concern with the spiritual state of even those who strayed away from the ideals of the Puritan tradition. At the outset of the letter, Mather points to the lamentations of “our neighborhood” and their affection and remembrance of them. Then putting himself in the shoes of Jeremiah he wrote what follows:

And as the Remembrance which we have of you, causes us, Without ceasing to make mention of you in our prayers, and our ardent and constant cries unto the God of all Grace, that you may have Grace to help you, in your Time of Need, so, it puts us upon Writing unto you, those things, which may help to Instruct, and Strength, and Comfort you, in the midst of your Terrible temptations. Jeremiah the Prophet, thought it his Duty, to write a Letter unto those of his people, that were carried Captives, by a Bitter and Hasty Nation. And from a sense of Duty it is, that we now send a letter unto you, for your consolation in that Captivity, where you are now languishing under Bitter, and Heavy Afflictions. (Cotton, 2016, p.3)

Apart from the evocation of Babylonian captivity, Mather (2016) also invoked the Egyptian captivity as Biblical intertext to urge the Barbary captives to “hearken to those Admonitions which now must be given to you” (p.3).

The admonitions are principally concerned with conversion or apostasy. In making his case against conversion, Mather relied on reported experience of previous captives who had wrongly thought that turning Muslim would improve their material conditions. Renegades, he cautioned, forsook their faith only to see their conditions becoming worse with God wrecking his vengeance upon them by confusing their minds, and causing their “oppressors [...] to sleigh them, and vex them, and more barbarously than ever to multiply Oppressions upon them. (p. 4)”

Gradually, Mather modulated his discourse about the dangers of apostasy to Islam sharply contrasted with the Christian faith to make his letter assume the contours of a jeremiad, or at least its major function which is conversion to the discipline of Christianity. In this regard, he urged the captives to meditate on their Barbary captivity or slavery in the following terms:

And it may be, the dismal Affliction of your Captivity, is come upon you to Convince you of, and Convert you to those things in Religion, whereof you were so insensible, when you heard them

dispensed unto you, in the Ordinances of the Gospel, which you sometimes enjoyed. Yea, t'wil be an happy Captivity, that is now come upon you, if the Ears of your Souls be now open to the Discipline of Christianity, of which it may be, the lord from Heaven saves unto you (p.9).

The gist of the argument is that the Barbary captives were already in the worst sort of captivity, in other terms the captivity in sin. “Every Sinful Child is by Nature so, (Ibid.)” he admonished them. Physical captivity by the Moroccan corsairs did not condemn to similar torments as spiritual slavery by the “powers of Darkness”.

Mather changed the register of his discourse by counseling the captives to make their profession of faith true to their practice, in other words to repent their backsliding in their time of physical freedom and to practice God’s commandments in order to be born again as new converts to the Christian religion. To comfort the captives, Mather resorts to a profuse Biblical intertextuality pertaining to captivity, all to the effect that it was God’s providence that initially put them in the hands of the Moroccan corsairs and it was the same providence that would eventually buy them their redemption. To bring out that redemption, Mather called the captives to pray truthfully to God. He ended his letter with the codification of the way these prayers had to be made and with the recommendation of selected Biblical passages all of them related to captivity and redemption for meditation. Thus, the captives might have flouted the national covenant in associating themselves with merchant or worldly interests, but their case was not hopelessly desperate because they were not excluded from the benefit of an ultimate redemption from captivity in accordance with the covenant of grace on the condition of active cooperation through prayer. It is also interesting to note the irony of the comparison of the colonial American captives in Barbary with Joseph’s captivity in Egypt in these very last lines of the letter:

Yea, if you carry your selves, patiently, and Honestly, and Faithfully, and Industrially, as well as Prayerfully, in the Hard Service, which is by the Providence of God put upon you, the lord may not only Encline your masters to favour you (as Joseph did him, in his Captivity!) but may also make use of you, to do an unknown deal of Good, where He hath now appointed your uneasy stations. (2006, p.6)

Through the evocation of the Biblical intertext of Joseph’s captivity, Mather promises both eternal salvation as well as temporal blessings for the American Barbary captives.

If in the *Letter to the English captives in Africacaptivity* is subsumed under the captivity in sin, and so appears as subspecies captivity, in the *Glory of Goodness...* (1703) it is human agency that is subsumed by divine agency in the comfort and the eventual redemption of the captives. Placed within the Puritan covenantal theology, captivity in Meknes was not seen as a totally negative experience. It is even qualified as a “happy event”, since the suffering that it entails was regarded as a divine affliction that would make the captives by sin reflect on what was wrong with their relations with God in order to be eventually reconciled with him. So the *Letter to the English Captives in Africa* in a way is a welcomed event since it leads the captives to self-examination and reconciliation with God. It turns events over which they originally had no control since they were

willed by God to their spiritual and material advantage. God's supreme agency in the capture of the captives is also seen at work in the redemption and improvement of the spiritual state of the captives in *The Glory of Goodness ...* (1703), which as a thanksgiving sermon is first and foremost a celebration of the "remarkable instances" of the manifestation of God's agency in the redemption of the captives and the "improvements" of that it had brought to their spiritual state.

The Glory of Goodness ... (1703) is strictly speaking not a captivity narrative, at least not of the sort of classic captivity account, but an interpretation of it in the form of a thanksgiving sermon. As such it offers theological directions about the way the captives themselves would eventually recount orally or in print, or meditate on their redemption from captivity, and the manner these accounts would be received by the listener and the reader as part and parcel of devotional meditative exercise. Mather's sermon puts into prominence the idea that captivities are meant to be as reflections on the meaning or meanings of the captivity represented by the accounts, which generally included prefaces in that direction. Modern readership theory generally claims that the meanings of texts depend largely on the reading practice and knowledge that the reader brings to bear on the text. I would contend that this holds equally true for the readers of the captivities in their times of production, but the latter are often cued about what to pause on and reflect on in the captivity. The identity of the ideal reader or listener, as is the case of Mather's sermon, is that of a devout Puritan in search of material for devotional practice. The full title, *The Goodness of God, Celebrated; in Remarkable Instances and Improvements thereof: And more particularly in the Redemption remarkably obtained for the English Captives, Which have been languishing under the Tragical, and the Terrible, and the Most Barbarous Cruelties of Barbary. The History of what the Goodness of God, has done to the Captives, lately delivered out of Barbary* (1703) explicitly tags the sermon-cum-captivity for a devout audience.

It is true that *The Glory of Goodness ...* (1703) primarily celebrates the supreme agency of God in the redemption of the captives and that the reader is invited to take the cue from the pastor Mather as to the religious meaning to be derived from the account of God's intervention in the historical fact of the captivity and redemption of American captives from Meknes. However, it is also true that it draws a distinctive picture of the identity of the captives themselves by contrast to both other captives in Meknes and the captors who had reduced them to slavery. This is by no means a contradiction since it is all clear for Mather that the captives are among the Elect by the simple fact that they were Puritan. Mather lists three interventions of God as remarkable in fortifying the captives' sense of identity in their resistance to what were considered as both a danger to existential being and pollution to their souls. The first area in which God fortifies the captive is in "Their Way of Living, (or, shall I not rather say, their Way of Dying)" (p. 61). It goes without saying that this Way of Living was sharply in contrast with the New England Way of Life that had shaped the identity of the captives in the way they eat, dress, and observe religious rituals, take rest, and so on and so forth. This England Way of Life was obviously in crisis at the time of the captivity if we take into consideration what was made of it in the jeremiads, but still in the process of fashioning it, it had developed into what Bourdieu (2013, chap. 4) calls the *habitus*.

It is the infringement of this *habitus* or that is a culture-specific corporeal identity that makes the captivity particularly stressful for the American captives. Mather relies on two testimonies, one of them a brief, by their “late Majesties K. William and Q. Mary” (p. 61), and the other by a returned captive, for his description of the Captives’ gruesome conditions of life in Meknes, Morocco. Four details in the quote from King William’s and Mary’s brief are italicized by Mather as cases of disturbance of the identity or *habitus* of the captives: the non-enjoyment of “days of rest on the Turkish Sabbath or Ours,” “Extreme labor,” “diet” consisting of “decay’d Barley, which stinketh so, that the Beasts refuse to eat it” and the fact their task masters were “Black-a-moors” (pp. 61-2). In Mather’s quote from the returned American captive’s account, details related to the captives’ horrible housing or lodging are singled out as illustrative examples with a further emphasis that they were overworked by Black-a-moors, this time significantly referred to as “Negroes.” Mather gives the final touch to the gruesome conditions of life into which the captives were carried by mentioning the climate “so hot at some times, and so wet at others” (p. 62).

It goes without saying that captives could not be anything than human beings in extremis. They were, as Cotton’s quote of King William’s and Queen Mary’s Brief reads, “peaceably following their Employments at Sea [when they were] taken by the Turkish Pirates of Algiers, Salley, Barbary, and other places on the Coast of Africa” (p 61). We could easily imagine that they were snatched into an alien world and culture that threatened their physical survival and their identity by being obliged to acculturate by changing their food ways, accommodating themselves to a new climate, accepting new conditions of work under other humans dismissed as “Negroes”. The last detail is particularly interesting since it points to what looks like an abrupt switch, or swapping of identities, with the American captives ironically taking the place of those Black people that New Englanders like themselves had snatched from Africa to be their slaves. Obviously, by the time Mather had made his sermon, slavery had become racially distinctive in New England and in the other American colonies for him to be able to refer to the slavery of the white American captives as a traumatic experience. This role reversal was described as being particularly unsettling for captives given their subscription to the Puritan idea of New England as a Chosen Nation. For Mather, the fact that the New England captives had survived this traumatic experience and “outlived their sorrows” that is their emotional disturbance, bear evidence to two gospel truths: “They lived not by Bread alone, but by the Word of God [and] that the Heart of the King [Moulay Ismail] was in the Hand of the Lord” (p. 63). Having deduced these truths, Mather calls for the glorification of God for his “Goodness, and for these His wonderful Works unto the Children of Men” (p. 63).

God in Mather’s captivity-cum-sermon is the ultimate or final agent behind occasional acts of kindness on the part of Moroccan captors towards their captives. This is true for all Puritan captivity narratives. The characterization of the Barbary captors as demonic agents would have made voluntary human kindness out of character and unnatural. These acts of kindness become natural only if they are put within a theological Puritan framework wherein God appears as the real actor and the captors just his instrument. Hence, when the Moroccan captors allowed the captives

to practice freely their religion, Mather ascribes this act of kindness to the “Remarkable *Goodness of God*” (p. 63). In so doing, a theological meaning was given to a seemingly unnatural act without abjuring all the cultural and religious stereotypes heaped on the Muslim captors. We can understand that God intervened in history not only in order to chastise, but also to protect and instruct. Mather details this act of kindness as follows:

It was a mighty Relief unto them that the English Captives there formed themselves into a SOCIETY, and in their Slavery enjoyed the Liberty to meet on the Lords Day Evening, every Week and annually chuse a Master and Assistents, and form a Body of Laws, to prevent and suppress Disorders among themselves. The Good Orders of their society, were a great Repastation, and Preservation unto them. And it afforded them no small Comforts to delight them, in the multitude of the Grievs upon them, that at their Meetings they still had one or other, who by Prayers, and other Exercises of Religion among them greatly Edified them (pp. 63-64).

The quote above contains many elements worth emphasizing. First, it is important that captives are in this case taken as a group and not singly. It is natural therefore for them to form what Mather calls a “Society”. Put in today’s anthropological idiom, one can see this society as a “*communitas*,” which Turner (1991) defines as the “*esprit de corps*” or group identity resulting from liminal experiences of the captives. Following the lead van Gennep, Turner has distinguished three distinct stages in tribal rites of passage or ritual processes involved in the ritualized transition from one social position to another: separation, margin or *limen*, and re-aggregation. Mather’s captivity-cum-sermon for example, involves a violent separation of American colonial sailors “peaceably following their Employments at Sea” from their own world and culture (p.61).

Their transfer into the alien culture of Meknes corresponds to the liminal stage. Here all the captives are reduced to a low status by becoming slaves. As slaves they shared the same crisis leading eventually to the formation of a community of sufferers resembling that “kind of normative *communitas* that characterizes the liminal phase of tribal initiation” (Turner, 1991, p. 133).

Slotkin (1973) and Vaughan & Clark (1981) amongst other scholars, have already applied the paradigm of the ritual process for understanding the process of change that actors involved in the frontier and in captivity went through. Slotkin relies on Campbell’s mono-myth theory to talk about what he calls the “regeneration through violence”. For him, the frontier experience provides a concrete example of Campbell’s monomyth or ritual process of social change. As for Vaughan & Clark, they have explicitly referred to Turner’s critical category in their discussion of the white Puritan captives in the hands of Indians (Intr.). However, these scholars have put little emphasis on the various aspects of “*communitas*” resulting from the experience of liminality.

Turner distinguishes between three types of *communitas*: spontaneous or existential *communitas*, normative *communitas*, and ideological *communitas* (chap. 4). Spontaneous *communitas* is described as a shortlived experience in the sense that “spontaneity or immediacy of *communitas* – as opposed to the jural- political character can seldom be maintained for very long”

p. 132). For Turner, free, direct, and direct human relationships soon develop into norm-governed relationships to form what he refers to a “normative communitas” (p. 132). “Under the influence of time,” he goes on to write, “the need to mobilize and organize resources, and the necessity for social control among the group in pursuance of these goals, the existential communitas is organized into a perduring social system” (p. 132). As regards ideological communitas, Turner associates it with the “utopian models of society based on existential communitas” (p. 132).

Following Turner, we would contend that the community of American captives described by Mather could be qualified as a normative communitas because their condition of liminality is far from being just a short experience. Its 20-year duration had permitted the development of what Mather calls a “Body of Laws” and the emergence of a structural hierarchy of “Master” and “Assistants” to keep “Good Orders.” The communal bonds and group identity was strengthened by “Prayers” and “Exercises of Religion.” What is to be noted here is that the “normative communitas” thus established was not solely a communitas among the captives themselves, but also a communitas of the captives with God. For Mather, this dual communitas is essentially remarkable “support from the goodness of God.” One can say that it is doubly remarkable for Mather who saw in it the regeneration through sacred violence of the national covenant and the Covenant of Grace that prevailed at home in New England. Thus regenerated or born again into covenantal life, the returned captives could be reincorporated into the community of Puritan believers. The sermon-cum-captivity in one sense is also concerned with the third stage of the ritual process of identity transformation, the ritual re-aggregation of the returnee captives into the primary body of the Puritan community.

The political implication of the norm-governed communitas created by the captives must be underlined. That Mather stresses the fact that the captives lived according to their own laws implies that they refused to give legitimacy to Islamic law. Though they were reduced to slavery, they did not give obedience to the Muslim masters, which would have been a first step in acculturation or conversion, but rather to elected masters and assistants among the members of their own religious community. This resistance to acculturation is explicitly developed in the evocation of the third remarkable intervention of God in the life of the captives, which concerns the fact “that none of these our Friends proved *Apostates*, from our Holy Religion, when they were under so many *temptations* to Apostasy” (p. 64)” In this respect, Mather recounts another illustrative anecdote about the solid faith of the American captives. This anecdote has it that an English man and a French man in Barbary captivity were caught after having tried to escape. They were brought before Emperor Moulay Ismail for trial. Mather continues the anecdote as follows:

The emperor (Sic.), upon Examination told them, if they did not immediately turn Moors, he would kill them. The French-man yielded; the Emperour then threatened the English-man, if he did not turn, he would quickly kill him. He made Answer, Gods Power was greater than the Devils, and let him do what he would, he should not make him turn Moor. The emperor called for his Sword, and immediately fell to cutting him ... (p. 65)

This anecdote offers a double insight into the Puritan mind. A Puritan listening to or reading Mather's anecdote cannot fail to see in the sacrifice of the American captive a case of Protestant martyrdom. For Puritans who were reared upon John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments of the English Martyrs*, "almost a second pillar" of the Protestant faith after the Bible (Loades 1979, p. 288), the association would be easy to make. For a Puritan to do otherwise than die for one's faith in face of the danger of apostasy would be equivalent to cowardice and a testimony of the shallowness of his faith. This was the case of the Catholic French man.

Mather's definition of the religious identity of the English man by contrast with that of the French man was not fortuitous. One has to look at it within the context of the collision of interests between the French and the English both in Europe and America as a result of the Seven Years' War or as it came to be called in American history King William's War (1689-97) followed by Queen Anne's War (1702-13). The French with their ambition to expand what they named New France in America made them the arch-enemy of the English settlers who had similar territorial ambitions. It is significant that it is a religious marker that Mather used to differentiate between the French man and the English man because the conflict between them had much to do with the conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism. Thus, Mather's anecdote states the religious and cultural separateness not only between the distant Muslim captors and the Puritan captives but also between the American captives and their immediate Catholic enemy close at home.

Once Mather has affirmed the solidity of the American captives' faith, he proceeded by offering his own material theory of why other captives by contrast with English American captives easily and readily deserted their faith for Islam. It has already been noted that conversion in Barbary captivity narratives was explained in several ways. Mattar (2008) distinguishes between three types of conversion in English writings: conversion under physical coercion, conversion because allurement by the power of Islam, and conversion because of material advancement (pp. 21-49). Mather in *The Glory of Goodness...* (1703) contends with those captive authors who linked conversion to Islam to physical torture. "One would have thought, that if anything should have made them turn Infidels, it would have been *Adversity*, and the Hope of getting thereby some Relaxation of their *Adversity*" (p. 65), he writes. Two arguments are put forward to deny this conversion-torture association. In the first place, God in the case of the American captives "would not suffer these our Friends to be *Tempted above what they were able*" (p.65).

Much more important in the steadfast commitment to one's faith in the eyes of Mather is the national character. He observes that "the Renegade's for the most part enjoy'd more *Prosperity*, and lived in Gentlemens Houses (sic) with much idleness, and luxury, and liberty, THESE (sic) for the most part were they that fell into the Snare of the Wicked" (p.65). He traces apostasy to the degenerate character of the converts, rather physical torture that might be inflicted upon them. By contrast with these, "those who were toiling about *Castles* or *Brickilns*, continued steadfast in the Faith of our Lord JESUS CHRIST" (p.65). Thus conversion, in his mind's eye, is ultimately related to sharp differences in character between the renegades and the faithful American captives. It is the Puritan ethic of work that comes uppermost in Mather's account of the

shaping of human character. In the final analysis, personal salvation of the American captives from eternal damnation that might have ensued from apostasy was also due to the cultural value or virtue of work which is part and parcel of New England Way of life.

The importance of the ethic of work in Puritan Salvationist theology and the rise of capitalism has already been fully documented by Webber and other scholars, so there is no need to expand on it any further in this research. Instead, one has to note that whilst Mather celebrates personal salvation through work and regeneration through suffering, he retains a Puritan theological frame for his sermon up to the end where he reminds the audience that the redemption of the captives could not have happened without prayer. “It was a Remarkable Goodness of God,” he says, “That now the deliverance of these our Friends is accomplished, and in a signal Answer to Prayer accomplished, and this not without Obstructions to the Accomplishments” (p.66). According to Berkotvitch (1978) the Salvationist Puritan theology as propounded by the Jeremiad is marked by “a climate of anxiety” and “a sense of insecurity” (p. 23) both as an end and a means for maintaining an ongoing pressure for the realization of the lifelong enterprise of salvation both in time and eternity. It is this climate of insecurity of the captives as to their redemption that is underlined by Mather at the end of his sermon.

He reports that in 1680, the English captives had addressed a petition to the “King of England” for redemption. Accordingly, a captain was being sent over to Morocco and an agreement was signed for their deliverance. But at the very moment of their liberation, it happened that the Moroccan Jews intervened to foil the whole operation by paying the same amount of ransom to the Moroccan king in return for keeping the English in captivity. The objective was to recruit them to “build the Jews town” (Mather Cotton, 66). Mather recounts how the Jew responsible for the prolongation of the captivity of the English was divinely punished by having his “brains horribly trod out, by one who purposely Rode over him. (Ibid)” In this account of Jewish perfidy against the English captives, Mather distances himself from the eschatologist, restorationist beliefs of his father Increase Mather, who strongly believed that the Jews would be restored to Palestine and would fight alongside the Christians against the Turks. The Jewish victory would then be followed by conversion to Protestant Christianity (Mattar 2008, pp. 171-173).

In Mather’s account of English captivity in Morocco, the Jews were conceived as a divine instrument used to delay redemption until God thought it fit. It is according to God’s temporal scheme not that of man that the captives were finally released. Until divine agency was activated by persistent prayer, all human action is vain. When “the Test Time for favor” was over, God tempered the “Devil Incarnate’s [Moulay Ismail’s] heart compelling him to deal more truly than he use (sic.) to do” (p.66). The ransom was quickly gathered and the captives were soon brought out of captivity, all thanks to God’s “awaken[ed] Spirit of Prayer in the Churches of poor New England” (p. 67). Thus, God’s supreme agency is affirmed in terms to both the captivity and redemption. It is God who afflicted the captives and it is God who released them, and it is also to this same God that the returned captives were asked to address their Prayers. Captivity was over

but for the returned regenerated captives to be reincorporated into the Puritan community, they needed to meditate on the meanings of their divinely ordained captivity and redemption, to recognize that the “*Lord ... Hast punished us far less than our Iniquities have deserved*(p.67),” to see his role in their release, and make thanksgiving prayers accordingly.

Conclusion

Overall, Mather’s *Pastoral Letter to the English Captives in Africa* and his *Glory of Goodness ...* (1703) were produced at a time of crisis in New England History. Interweaving the historical fact of New England captives in Morocco with sacred history, Mather re-affirms the Puritan identity in both its secular and religious facets. The ethic of work, the exceptional religious character of the captives in contrast with other nationals, the regeneration of the merchant-inclined captives through a god-ordained affliction, and God’s listening to the prayers of the New England church communities were some of distinctive marks of the New England Way of Life. In the final analysis, Mather’s works contain an affirmation that New England was not a God-forsaken nation, but a divinely favored one with a promised future. His evocation of Joseph’s captivity as a Biblical intertext towards the end of the *Pastoral Letter to the English Captives in Africa* transforms the captives’ adventure into a rags-to-riches story whilst his Puritan Salvationist vision in *The Glory of Goodness ...* (1703) confirms the renewal of the national covenant and the Covenant of Grace in an increasingly, commercially-oriented New England. In this sense, Mather spoke not only for the past, but also for the future celebrating American exceptionalism in a distinctly Puritan and feminized voice.

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