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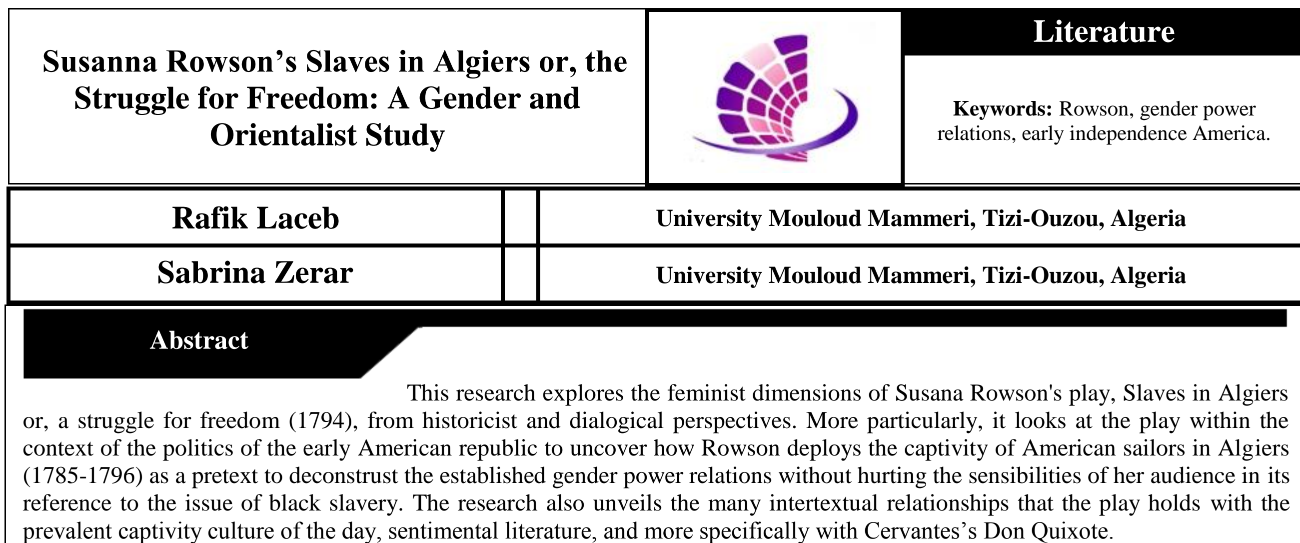

Susanna Rowson's Slaves in Algiers or, the Struggle for Freedom: A Gender and Orientalist Study

Literature

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Abstract

This research explores the feminist dimensions of Susana Rowson's play, Slaves in Algiers or, a struggle for freedom (1794), from historicist and dialogical perspectives. More particularly, it looks at the play within the context of the politics of the early American republic to uncover how Rowson deploys the captivity of American sailors in Algiers (1785-1796) as a pretext to deconstrust the established gender power relations without hurting the sensibilities of her audience in its reference to the issue of black slavery. The research also unveils the many intertextual relationships that the play holds with the prevalent captivity culture of the day, sentimental literature, and more specifically with Cervantes's Don Quixote.

Introduction

Rowson's *Slaves in Algiers or, a struggle for freedom* was occasioned by the Algerine-American crisis of 1785-1796 involving the seizure of more than a hundred American sailors by the Dey of Algiers. Performed at the New Theatres in Philadelphia and Baltimore in 1794, it was part and parcel of a makeshift fundraising campaign for the redemption of the American captives. Deploying the historicist, dialogic approach developed by Bakhtin (1984), this research explores the intertextuality that Rowson's play holds with the literature of captivity of her time and Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (2000), with a particular emphasis on female characters and the function of the oriental setting of Algiers as both a foil and a mirror image of the early American republic. As a foil, Algiers as a place of oriental "vice" is meant to stand in sharp contrast to American virtue, thus creating an instance of American virtue-in-distress, one of the halls marks of sentimental literature and drama. In its functioning as a mirror, the same setting is intended to reflect the evil of gender oppression in the very republic that proclaimed very loudly that it was founded on virtue.

Rowson's allegorical play orientalizes the United States by making her audience see to what extent the distressed conditions of American women resemble those of their oriental counterparts because of similar conditions of patriarchal captivity. The appeal to the sympathy of the audience is thus made with a twofold purpose: raising funds for the redemption of American captives and bringing out the conditions for change in the status of women in the new republic. Virtue is best embodied in virtuous female figures, both oriental and non-oriental ones, which like Richardson's *Pamela* (1985) are caught in the clutches of orientalized or rather allegorized American male characters.

Historical context

A brief history of the Algerian crisis needs to be inserted here to put the discussion of Rowson's play in a meaningful context. The crisis started with a first round of seizure involving the capture of two American merchantmen by Algerine corsairs off the Portuguese coast, the *Maria* and the *Dauphin* in the summer of 1785. The United States had won its independence two years earlier in 1783, and so was no longer protected by treaties of peace binding Britain to Algiers. When it resumed the transatlantic trade, its merchant ships, in the absence of a navy, were considered as good prey in accordance with the plunder economy inherited from the previous centuries and to which Algiers still strongly held. Intervening just after the Spanish-Algerian treaty of peace of 1784 that allowed Algerine cruisers to go through the Straits of Gibraltar to the Atlantic, the two American ships were caught totally off guard. In the face of the intransigence of Algiers, the fledgling diplomatic corps guided by Thomas Jefferson adopted an attitude of indifference in the hope of getting a better redeeming price for the captives. Most importantly, the non-availability of cash of a republic dependent on the reluctant will of the States for its revenues; the deep concern for the re-organization of the Confederation; and the outbreak of war between Britain and France had made the issue of captivity in Algiers such a subsidiary issue that by 1788 the captives were practically resigned to their fate.

The second round of capture, much more substantial than the first one in that it concerned 11 merchant ships, occurred in the wake of the Anglo-Portuguese truce of 1793 that allowed the Algerine corsairs once again to sail through the Strait of Gibraltar into the Atlantic. By then the United States had already adopted the Constitution and elected George Washington President. The nation was now ready to listen to the dismal news of captivity coming out of the Barbary Coast in the form of official reports and correspondence from the captives. Most of the letters from the captives were widely circulated in the press, emphasizing the terrible degradations experienced at the hands of their "oriental" captors, and in accordance with the moral economy of the time, playing on the emotions or sensibility of the readers to tear at their heartstrings the better to make them put their hands into their purse and pay for their ransom. It is in the context of this whipped-up public opinion and fundraising campaigns that Rowson came to write and perform her play. Eventually, the cost for the redemption of the captives in 1796 was made out of the public purse now capable of sustaining the huge ransom demanded by Algiers as a result of the new financial provisions that the Constitution gave to the federal government.

Results and discussion

Intertexts in the forward matter

The best way to start the discussion of Rowson's play is the irony contained in its title *Slaves in Algiers or, the struggle for freedom*. The strategic deployment of the words "slave" and "struggle for freedom" could not have passed unnoticed in a slaveholding nation, though the play was set in the far-distant Barbary Coast.

In the first place, Rowson was not alone to deploy it since nearly all the captives used the term "slave" and "slavery" by contrast with freedom in their letters home and later in their published journals, the most famous of which, is *Of the captivity and sufferings of John Foss* (Baepler, Ed. 1999). The usage of the term reflects a literary convention established as a consequence of the sensibility cult and the moral economy of the time. However, though the term arose out of a change in the emotional make-up of the age, it turned out to be problematic in the context of the anti-slavery movement struggle for the human emancipation of the slaves across a racially divided nation. In this light, the reference to "slaves in Algiers" instead of the much more correct word, "captives in Algiers" is ideologically loaded, most particularly in its link with the prepositional phrase "or the struggle for freedom."

The suggestion of a slave rebellion though transported to the far-distant Barbary Coast could defeat the very purpose of fundraising for which the play was written in the first place since the analogy and the possibility of a slave uprising in the US could easily steal into the mind of benefactors and black slaves alike. Though Rowson promptly sought to declare her ideological innocence in the preface by saying that "My chief aim has been, to offer to the public a Dramatic Entertainment, which it might excite a smile, or call forth the tear of sensibility might contain no one sentiment, in the least prejudicial, to the moral or principles of the government in which I live" (p.6). In other words, Rowson was just complying with the convention of the day in seeking to whip up the sensibility of her audience by pointing to the condition of near-slavery in which the American captives in Algiers were held. She continued the defence of her "innocent" case by making it clear that her work complied with the newly established tradition of celebrating and consolidating republican virtue by contrast with the vices of aristocratic Europe through the arts. "On the contrary," she wrote, "it has been my endeavour, to place the social virtues in the fairest point of view, and hold up, to merited contempt, their opposite vices" (p.6).

In the context of the rest of the forward matter comprising a map of the Barbary Coast by Mathew Carey, a preface, and a prologue, Rowson's solemn declaration of innocence seems to be a ploy deployed to escape the censorship of the audience that might censor her for the subversive drive of what will follow in the rest of play. Her disclaimer notwithstanding, the analogy between slavery in Algiers and slavery in America is introduced through a cartographic intertext in the forward matter. Indeed, Rowson attached a map taken from Carey's *A short history of Algiers, with a concise view of the origin of the rupture between Algiers and the United States* (1794). Published nearly four months before the performance of Rowson's play, and because of its wide circulation at the highest point in the Algerian crisis, Carey's book was employed as a backdrop against which the play could be interpreted. Critics like Peskin (2009) took to task Rowson for having reduced to the minimum her description of Algiers, and claimed that with such a minimal setting the story could have happened anywhere else in the world. In making this point, Peskin overlooked the importance of the cartographic intertext from Carey, and her suggestion that her play has to be viewed with that intertext already in mind.

The question that arises at this stage is what political or social subtext does this intertext introduce into the play in relation to the issue of slavery? We would argue that it is through Carey's cartographic intertext that Rowson makes the analogy between Algiers and America as slaveholding countries. Carey laid a finger on this sore point of slavery, reminding his fellow Americans that "For this practice of buying and selling slaves, we are not entitled to charge the Algerines with any exclusive degree of barbarity. [And that] the Christians of Europe and America carry on this commerce an hundred times more extensively than the Algerines" (As cited in Peskin, 2009, p.2). Naturally, given her gender and arguably because of the performative nature of her work, Rowson could not afford to be so controversial in raising the issue of slavery in the United States. That is why she resorted to Carey's cartographic intertext. It is only towards the end of the play that Rowson introduced a more explicit reference to the issue of chattel slavery, but by then it is thought that the anti-slavery pill was swallowed in its sugary coat, and thus the political and social subtext had grown less potentially offensive to an emotionally worked-out audience. In the final climatic scene, the struggle for freedom ends with the reversion in the situation of the characters, with the Christian characters now holding in power the Dey Muley Moloc and the renegade Jew Ben Hassan. A Spanish slave proposes to mete out the same punishment to the Dey as the one that the latter applied to his ex-slaves, but the American leader of the rebellion, Frederick, argues against it as follows: "We are freemen, and while we assert the rights of men, we dare not infringe the privileges of a fellow creature" (p.73). Hence, the principle of human rights is underlined and is universally observed even toward the North African "Barbarian".

This rhetoric of freedom and human rights is taken over by the female American heroine Rebecca when the Spanish slave presses further the issue of enslaving the Dey, his former oppressor: "By Christian law," she says, "no man should be made a slave; it is a word so abject that, but to speak it dyes the check with crimson" (p.73). She goes further in her anti-slavery rhetoric by rebounding on her fellow American's conception of freedom, saying that Americans, meaning male white Americans must free themselves, "but let us not throw on another's neck, the chain we scorn to wear" (p.73). The accusation that the American white males have failed to apply to others, women and black females, in the new republic is barely disguised in this end-of-the play quotation, which us leads back to the proclamation of human rights across gender lines made in the prologue:

"Some say – the Comic muse, with watchful eye,/ Should catch the reigning vices as they fly,/ Our author boldly has revers'd that plan,/The reigning virtues she has dar'd to scan,/And tho' a woman, plead the Rights of Man" (pp.8-9).

Before coming back to the issue of gender in the play proper, a few further points need to be made about the functions of the forward matter, comprising as said earlier a map of the Barbary Coast, a preface, and a prologue. It has already been observed that the map sets the play in context and functions as an intertext for the understanding of the political and social subtext of the play.

To this function, we have to add that Carey's book in its emphasis on the manners and customs of the Algerines substantiates the claim as to the striking difference in sensibility between the West and Africa abiding in this by the deep-seated dichotomy between the West as a civilized part of the World, and Africa as a savage continent. Rowson resorts to the *Iliad* as intertext for setting the contrast between the two civilizations in terms of sensibility. Hence at the start of the prologue, Rowson resorted to Homer's the *Iliad*, an epic at the core of which is the captivity of Helen in Troy, to distinguish between Algerine Barbarity and the sensibility of Greek/American civilization. The following verses provide a good illustration of Ancient Greece/America as a land of sensibility:

"When aged Priam, to Achilles' tent/ To beg the captive corse [sic] of Hector went,/The silent suppliant spoke the father's fears,/He sighs his eloquence – his prayers his tears,/The noble conqueror by the sight was won,/ And to the weeping sire restor'd the son" (p.7).

This evocation of this scene of sensibility wherein the outraged Achilles responds to the prayers and tears of Priam, whose son Hector is being dragged outside the city walls behind his chariot corresponds to the moral economy in the age of sensibility. The relationships between kindred spirits, though separated by millennia, are regulated by the affect. The case is sharply different with the Algerines since they do not respond to the American call for benevolence. The prologue makes the contrast in the second stanza as follows:

No great Achilles holds your sons in chains,/No heart alive to friends' or father's pains,/ No generous conqueror who is proud to shew,/ That valor vanquish'd is no more his foe;-/ But one, whose idol, is his pilfer'd gold,/Got, or by piracy, or subjects sold./ Him no fonder father's prayers nor tears can melt,/ Untought to feel for, what he never felt. (p.7)

As the above quotation shows, the Algerines are excluded from human civilization on the criterion of the age, that of sensibility, the fact that their cruelty is not melted by the tears and prayers of the captives' kith and kin. The lack of a moral economy is traced to the lack of education in the particular domain of the affect. The age of sensibility, following the prevalent theories of education propounded by such thinkers as John Locke and Adam Smith, held that the instruction in the affections a paramount feature of civilization. For Rowson, who wrote most of her fictions in the vein of sensibility, the Algerines are simply insensible, that is uncivilized idolaters given to the worship of Mammon, and totally incapable of sympathy to supplications because of the lack of education.

Her deployment of Carey's intertext containing a description of the cruel manners and customs of the Algerians further supports the contrast that she sets between the Greek civilization bequeathed to the Americans, and the Algerian "barbarity". It has to be noted that the majority of the proto-anthropological writings about the customs and manners of the time used the criterion of the refinement of sensibility as a divisive marker between civilization and savagery.

Mostly derived from the British orientalist tradition, Carey's intertext exaggerated the savagery of the captors by abrogating whatever positive aspects in the Algerine culture in order to capitalize as much as possible on the hysteric mood of the Algerian crisis. Furthermore, it brought closer to home the Algerine captivity by comparing the Algerines to the "North-American savages" in their particularly cruel way of severing thieves' hands, drowning adulteresses, impaling, throwing Christian slaves from the Algiers walls onto iron hooks, burning them on the stake, delivering bastinadoes for futile offences, and so on. It is in this way that Carey's intertext serves as a supplement to the contrast that Rowson set between the Greek civilization and the Algerine barbarity in matters of sensibility.

Before moving to the discussion of the play proper, it is important to underline the type of audience to which the play was primarily intended. First, it has to be noted that in the new republic, women were excluded from the type of republicanism based on self-interest. They were supposed to devote themselves to the care and well-being of society, in this case the raising of ransom money by appealing to sympathy. Rowson did not default on this duty by writing her play, nor did she fail at the same time to bring the caveat that her play might not meet all the artistic criteria required of a dramatist of quality in the genre of epic theatre. In formulating this caveat, she leveled a critique of a gendered education system that excluded females from the study of the classics in the original. "I am fully sensible," she tells her audience,

> of the many disadvantages under which I consequently labor from a confined education; nor I do expect my style will be thought equal in energy, to the production of those who, fortunately, from their sex, or situation in life, have been instructed in the classics, and have reaped both pleasure and improvement by studying the Ancients in their original purity. (p.6)

So if the play should fail to achieve the goal for which it is primarily written and performed, the fault is not the author's, but that of her society that had not accorded an equal access of women to education to fulfill even the disinterested role of touching the sympathy of the people and getting them help with the redemption of the Algerine captives. As if to demonstrate that what she said about the disabling gendered system is true, Rowson had the prologue, where references to the classics are made, "written and spoken by Mr Fennel" (p.7). In the epilogue, the audience to whose appreciation the play was submitted became explicitly clear. Written and spoken by Mrs Rowson herself, Rowson was prompted in the epilogue to drop off her mask as actor for the role of the central character, Rebecca, and to address herself to the audience. In the first stanza, she outspokenly renewed the feminist standpoints that she adopted throughout the drama:

> Sir I am here- but I'm in such a flurry,/ Do let me stop a moment just for breath,/ Bless me! I'm almost terrify'd to death. Yet sure, I had no real cause for fear,/ Since none but liberal-generous friends are here. Say- will you kindly overlook my errors?/ You smile. – Then to the winds I give my terrors./ Well Ladies tell me – how d'ye like my play; "The creature has some sense," methinks you say;/ "She says that we should have supreme dominion,/ "And in good

truth, we're all of her opinion./" Women were born for universal sway; "Men to adore, be silent, and obey. (p.77)

Hence, the feminist purport of the play is explicitly stated. If Rowson had withheld the above statement until the stage of epilogue, it is, arguably, because she might otherwise have got little interest from the audience including that of females. The Algerine crisis offered her an opportunity to address what at first sight looked like a secondary issue (gender power relations) without sounding too offensive right from the start by setting her play in Algiers.

Characterization and displacement

However, we note right at the outset that the focus of the play is put on rebelling female characters outraged by the patriarchal system. Most importantly, and in parallel with the displacement of setting to Algiers, the white female characters till towards the end of the play spoke through the oriental female counterparts whom they had instructed in their feminist ideology. The setting in Algiers is limited to the palace of the Dey, Muley Moloc, and the house of the renegade Jew, Ben Hassan, with the focus on the simmering rebellion in their respective harems. So, in scene I, Act I, we first come across Fetnah discussing with her maid Selima about her condition of captivity in Dey's harem. She has just been married or rather, as she implies it, "sold" by her father Ben Hassen to the Dey. In the course of her complaint, Fetnah borrows the kind of rhetoric of human emancipation that one finds in such feminist authors such as Mary Wollstonecraft in her comparison of her feeling of confinement by the all the comfort provided to her by the Dey. For her, freedom could by no means be bartered for the material well-being afforded to her as the Dey's favourite, for it is an innate human virtue. Using the metaphor of a caged bird looking for escape, she responds to Selima's astonishment at her complaint as follows: "O, a great many things – In the first place, I wish for liberty. Why do you talk of my being a favorite; is the poor bird that is confined in a cage … consoled for the loss of freedom" (p.13).

Fetnah continues to deplore her marital conditions of enslavement in the Dey's harem. To Selima's statement that her master loves her, Fetnah points out to his ugliness and the difference of age between her and her master-husband. "No –," she exclaims, "he is old and ugly; then he wears such tremendous whiskers; and when he makes love, he looks so grave and I declare, if it was not for fear of his huge seymetar [sic] I should burst out a laughing in his face" (p.14). It has to be observed that, for an audience aware of Wollstonecraft's intertext, the metaphor of the bashaw-husband in his harem invoked by Rowson, is intended as a generalization of the unequal husband-wife relationship in the traditional form of marriage dismissed as an abominable institution of slavery. Against all filial instincts, the "greedy Jew" Ben Hassan bartered his daughter for the material favours of a Dey in dotage, a matrimonial bartering that would not have failed to provoke the expected outrage of the audience, if it directly involved white American characters.

Similarly the audience would not have purchased the provocative attitude that Fetnah adopted to the Dey if the husband were a white male character. But in her case, Fetnah do not only rejects to welcome the Dey in her apartment for the honey moon, but is also bold enough to tell the Dey to his face that she cannot love him. Marriage for her cannot be reduced to a male business. To an astonished Selima, she reports the following exchange with the Dey during their first encounter:

mustering up as much courage as I could; great and powerful Muley, said I – I am sensible I am your slave; you took me from an humble state, placed me in this fine palace, and gave me these rich cloaths [sic]; you bought my person of my parents, who loved gold better than they did their child; but my affections you could not buy. I can't love you. – How! Cried he, starting from his seat: how can't love me? – and he laid his hand upon his seymatar [sic]. (p.15)

She saves her life just in time by holding the Dey's hand and begging not to refrain from killing her, to which supplication the Dey responds by ordering her out of his sight because he considers that she was "beneath her anger" (p.16).

Wollstonecraft's intertext, *The vindication of the rights of women*, shows in the way Fetnah explains to Selima how she came to hate the manners and customs of Algiers, at least as they are embodied in the matrimonial institution. First, she belies Selima by saying that Algiers is not her native land and that she was born in England. Her father brought her to Algiers in his escape from prosecution for a fraudulent banking operation in her country of birth. Algiers was then reputed for being a haven for criminals of all sorts. As she further explains to Selima, though she is "educated in the Moorish religion, [she] had always had a natural antipathy for their manners" (p.16). With this natural antipathy, she is very receptive to the feminist ideology that Rebecca, her father's American captive, later dispenses to her. Caught during one of her father's sponsored corsair operations, Rebecca becomes her real mentor. "It was she," she movingly tells Selima, "who nourished in my mind the love of liberty, and taught me, woman was never formed to be the abject slave of man. Nature made us equal with them, and gave us the power to render ourselves superior" (p.16). This statement is an echo of the preamble of the Constitution, but the theory that education and environment and not heritage play a more important role of the formation of character comes from Wollstonecraft's *The vindication of the rights of women*. As said earlier, this vindication of the emancipation of woman is less offensive than would have been if it had come straight from Rebecca's mouth.

Most importantly, when Fetna reappears in Act II, Scene II of the play, she no longer passively contents herself with pronouncements about freedom but becomes progressively a performative agent in her liberation and that of other captives. In this act and its scenes, largely inspired by Cervantes's intertext of the famous episode of captivity in *Don Quixote*, Fetna is in the garden of the palace, dreaming about falling in love and marrying a Christian, who will carry her from the land of captivity, when Frederic a freed captive scheming for the liberation of the rest of

captives surprises her. Just as in a fairytale, her wakeful dream becomes true as Frederic answers her loud wish by coming out of his hideout and throwing her a compliment. The latter takes her for Muley Moloc's daughter, Zoriana, who like her counterpart in Don Quixote, has passed the money used both as ransom for himself and Henry, and for the preparation of an escape plan. Fetnah realizes that she is mistaken for someone else, but she does not dispel this "comedy of errors" or mistaken identity in order to indulge further in her own romance.

This romance, in its turn, stylizes to a great extent the same romance in the Barbary captivity episode in Cervantes's book. The two lovers are in the flirting process when Muley Moloc and his slave, Mustapha, worried by Fetnah's long absence, came on them in the garden. To save Frederic's life, she faints in the arms of her new-found lover pretending that Frederic has protected her from a marauding horde of Turks. To justify the presence of Frederic in the garden, she invents the story that he is sent by her father Ben Hassan to gather some herbs for a salad. In Act II scene III that follows, the play resumes the conversation between Selima and Fetnah dropped in Act I, Scene I wherein Fetnah voices the same deprecations against the customs and manners of Algiers and resolves to undo her captivity by "bestow [her] affections on some young Christian" (p.46) that she refrains to name. At the very moment of her resolution, an opportunity is offered to her to put it into action. Sadi, one of the slaves to the prince Soliman, stumbles into Fetnah's room carrying the prince's clothes. Fetnah takes them from him before dismissing Sadi, and telling the terrified Selima that she will disguise herself and "go to the Dey to see if he will know" her. Selima's warning notwithstanding, remains defiant insisting that "if you [Selima] see you are afraid of them, they'll hector and domineer finely, no no let them think you don't care whether they are pleased or no, and then they'll be as condescending and humble" (p.47). Such generalization about domestic violence and masculine domination uncovers the allegorical approach of Rowson's orientalized characterization. From the particular situation of oriental domestic or male tyranny, Rowson moves to the universal condition of female subjection and the necessity for women to stand up against it if ever they want to put a stop to it.

Following the lead of a huge number of Shakespeare's female characters, Fetnah drops out the idea of confronting the Dey, but goes off in the prince's clothes (Sadi's) to join her lover, Frederic, one of the members of a band in process of putting into action an escape plan in a nearby grotto. Cross-dressed as Prince Sadi, who supposedly has found about this escape plan, Fetnah is intercepted and taken to Frederic by Sebastien, a Spanish member of the band. Threatened with execution, she uncovers her real identity and runs to her lover for rescue. Once sure that the plan is not discovered, the band decides to go ahead with it. But Fetnah begs Frederic to comply with one last request before she embarks with him. The request has to do with the liberation of her mentor Rebecca about whom she says the following: "I have a dear friend, who is a captive at my father's [Ben Hassan's]; she must be released, or Fetnah cannot be happy, even with the man she loves" (p.51). Abiding by this request, Frederic, after discussion with his friend Henry, resolves to leave behind his beloved for the sake of protection as he musters part of the band to Ben Hassan's house

to free Rebecca. It is at this point of the play that Fetnah is being offered another chance to make out a strong case against the male pretention of being the protectors of women.

The sequence pertaining to the dispute between Fetnah and Frederic deserves to be quoted extensively as it illustrates how the former contests very strongly the latter's view of the weak nature of females on the basis of which males hold sway on them. This sequence runs as follows:

Frederic (Addressing himself to Sebastian): Treat her with all imaginable respect: - Go, my good Sebastian; be diligent, silent, and expeditious. You, my dear Fetnah, I will place in an inner part of the grotto, where you will be safe, while we effect the escape of Olivia's father.

> Fetnah: "What, shut me up! – Do you take me for a coward?
> Henry: "We respect you as a woman, and would shield you from danger.
> Fetnah: "A woman!- Why, so I am; but in the cause of love or friendship, a woman can face danger with as much spirit, and as little fear, as the bravest man amongst you. – Do you lead the way; I'll follow to the end. (p.52)

Fetnah, as Rowson's mouthpiece, puts the males straight by debunking a prejudice that enables them to keep women in confinement, out of the public space on the false excuse that females have a weak face and thus need the protection of their male counterparts. It has also to be noted that gender roles in matters of love are reversed since it is Fetnah, who finally flirts with Frederic, making a very small case of the customs and manners of Algiers.

Fetnah is not the sole orientalized character that Rowson deploys to criticize masculine domination. Zoriana, the Dey's daughter, is also used for the same purpose. Her name sounds similar to Zoraida in the Barbary captivity narrative of Cervantes's intertext, which props up the whole plot of the play. Since this intertext is employed to develop a hidden polemic on the reality of unequal gender relationship in the early American republic, a brief summary is needed to see how it is manipulated by Rowson in that direction. The Barbary narrative account included in Cervantes's Don Quixote is a romanced autobiographical element of the author's captivity in Algiers. It relates how a Spanish captive imprisoned very close to the house of Hajji Mourad, one of the Algerine notables, escapes from captivity through the help of the latter's daughter, whose name is Zoraida. Converted to Christianity by her father's Christian slave, Zoraida having established a love relationship with the captive by messages transmitted in a handkerchief attached to the end of a cane held out of a latticed window finishes to hand him in the same way the ransom money needed to buy his freedom and that of his fellow captives. It is agreed through exchanged notes that the captive will help her escape from the land of captivity that is Algiers to the land of Lala Meriem, that is Christian land, where she promises to marry the captive.

This romanced captivity goes on recounting the preparations for escape, many of them taken over by Rowson in the play; a desperate Hajji Mourad on the sea shore putting his curse on a daughter who has made away with all his riches; their capture on the high seas by pirates who seize their money; and finally their reunion with the captive's family in Spanish territory that Zoraida calls the land of Lalla Meriem, a vernacular reference to the Virgin Mary.

In her preface to the play, Rowson recognizes that she has drawn heavily on the above intertext, which, to say the least, has much to do with a collective and individual wishful thinking given the reality of power relations between the two sides of the Mediterranean Sea in Cervantes's time. Rowson participates in this fantasy in borrowing this intertext, but this is not the issue that we wish to raise in this research. Admittedly we could well imagine that Rowson deployed the Cervantes's captivity intertext with the aim of giving support and staging a moral victory to a captive nation incapable of freeing her captives by force of arms. However, as we would argue Rowson is primarily interested in raising the issue of confined American females at home, and only secondarily that of the fate of the male captives abroad.

To develop her hidden polemic about unequal gender power relations, Rowson splits the role of Zoraida in Cervantes's captivity between Fetnah, Ben Hassan's daughter, and Zoriana, the Dey's daughter, while characterizing them as both female rebels in terms of their relation to their fathers and the customs and traditions of their native country. Enough has already been said about Fetnah's rebellion against the enslaving customs of her homeland, emphasis will, therefore, be put on the characterization of her double Zoriana. As a daughter of the Dey, Zoriana, like her intertextual counterpart in Cervantes's captivity, is brought up by a Christian female slave. When she appears on the stage for the first time in Act I, Scene III, she is in the company of a female American slave, Olivia, who recounts how she has landed in captivity in the Dey's house. The story goes that she is captured along with her sick father on their way from London to Lisbon in their quest for a healthier climate. Father and daughter have already tried to make an escape with the complicity of a bribed guard who has provided the father with false keys. The escape attempt is foiled, following which father and daughter are separated, the former imprisoned in a dungeon whilst the daughter with the false keys still on her is kept in an apartment in the Dey's palace.

It happens that the false keys are just what Zoriana is looking for to make her escape with Henry, an American captive, whom she has previously helped to buy his freedom and that of his fellow captives, in exactly the same manner and the same goal in mind as Zoraida in Cervantes's captivity intertext. Act I, Scene IV complicates further the plot of the romance between Henry and Zoriana in its description of an appointment in the palace garden under cover of darkness, between the captives, Henry and Frederic, on the one hand, and Zoriana and Olivia on the other. Henry has agreed to meeting with the two-fold aim of thanking Zoriana for her assistance and acquainting her with what he calls "the reality of [his] heart," (p.31) which is already settled on Olivia, whom he does not know that, just like in his case, has landed in the same captivity in Algiers. In this characterization, Henry departs from the traditional sentimental heroes, who do not hesitate to

abuse of the trust put in them by their beloved. As he tells Frederic, "it would be barbarous to impose on her [Zoraida's] generous nature – What? avail myself of her liberality to obtain my own freedom; take her from her country and friends, and then sacrifice her a victim to ingratitude and disappointed love" (p.31). The proverb "A word to the wise is sufficient" fits well the authorial intention with which Henry's statement is made, for it is a barely hidden attack on the male evil practice of heartless abuse of gullible mistresses prevalent in Rowson's days.

Scene I of Act II is primarily a recognition scene in which Olivia and Henry are re-united after separation by captivity. The former is seized by an Algerine corsair in the company of her father, whereas the latter is captured alone by another Algerine corsair on his way to join his beloved and his would-be father in Lisbon. Such a recognition scene is worthy of those staged by Shakespeare, for example, in his *Twelfth night* who strangely enough shares a character going by the same name, Olivia. At this point it is important to note that this scene renders Rowson's plot much more complex by making the romance between Zoriana and Henry enter the domain of what is referred to as an impossible love. Furthermore, it allows the playwright to make a similar point as the one that she has made through Henry. Females, just as is case with males, must not be slaves to their passion. An equivalent of the proverb already quoted in relation to Henry applies here. "If the cap fits, wear it," this other proverb says. And indeed, as soon as Zoriana realizes that Olivia and Henry are mutual lovers separated by the bad fortunes of the sea, she, though with a broken heart, respects their vows to each other and in so doing performs a Christian duty. Far from being a simple erotic experience, her love, as it appears in the following quotation, is transmuted into some sort of Platonic love. To Olivia who tells her not to "blame my Henry," Zoriana responds:

> Think not so meanly of me, as to suppose I live but for myself – that I loved your Henry, I can without a blush avow, but 'twas a love so pure that to see him happy, will gratify my utmost wish; I still rejoice that I've procured his liberty, you shall with him embrace the opportunity, and be henceforth as blest – (aside) as I am wretched. (p.35)

Joining words to action, she hands jewels and gold to Henry, whilst promising him to take care of the safety of his beloved and to help even further with the escape attempt by sending additional instructions. Olivia turns out to be equal to the occasion, for as soon as Henry goes out she persuades Zoriana to accept her decision to stay behind in order to assuage the Dey's wrath just in case the escape plan fails.

During all her captivity Olivia has flatly refused the Dey's request to convert to Islam in order to be able to marry her in accordance with the matrimonial law stipulated in the *Koran*. Hence for the safety and love of the other captives including Zoriana, Olivia offers herself as a sacrificial lamb on the altar of the licentious Dey.

Olivia's foreboding has turned real, at least for a moment, since the escape attempt is temporarily halted by the Dey's security guard. Alerted by the absence of Fetnah, Zoriana, and Olivia, the Dey, suspecting a plot from Constant, orders his guard to hunt down the captive escapees. Henry and Constant are arrested and presented before the Dey who summarily condemns them to death. It is at this moment that Olivia reappears to plead their release, and to secure their lives and freedom in exchange of her consent to turn Turk and to be his wife. The idea of Olivia as a sacrificial lamb is brought into focus in her contemplation to put an end to her life in atonement for apostasy. From a Pamela-like figure resisting successfully to her tormentor, Olivia turns into a potential Clarissa figure who contemplates suicide as the only way out of her miserable conditions. However, the drama receives another twisting turn, for immediately after Olivia's dreadful contemplation of turning Turk and marrying the Dey, Rebecca, her mother yet unknown to her, intervenes to save her life and spare her eternal damnation as apostate.

Scene VII, Act III is a scene of an emotional family reunion wherein the members of the Constant family meet again after a long separation first by the War of Independence and later by captivity in Algiers. Changed out of all recognition by the signs of age, it takes a long exchange between Olivia and Rebecca on the one hand, and Rebecca and Constant, before husband and wife guess the truth of the matter. The whole dramatic story of how the family is torn apart by the war and the Barbary captivity is as follows. Rebecca and Constant, a British army officer stationed in New York, fall into love and get married privately in a wartime context. Rebecca's father curses and spurns her after his discovery of the union. For four long years later, Rebecca has followed her husband's fortunes and has become in the meantime the mother of a daughter (Olivia), and an infant son (Augustus). On his death bed, the father relents and calls her to attend him. In responding to the call of duty, she takes her son with her and leaves behind her husband and her three-year old daughter. During her absence, the armies clash, and Constant is falsely reported as dead, and traces of the daughter are lost. At the death of her father, Rebecca becomes a wealthy, grieving widow, whose sole consolidation is her son Augustus.

Her story turns another dramatic turn. Soon after gettig wind that her husband is still alive she embarks in the company of her son on a voyage to London to join him. She never reaches her destination, since an Algerine corsair, sponsored by the Jewish renegade Ben Hassan seizes the ship. Mother and son land as captives in Ben Hassan's house. The story of this war-torn family is continued by Constant who tells Rebecca that indeed he is severely wounded but is rescued on time by a faithful servant of his. At the proclamation of the Independence of the United States, he is re-affected to India from which he returns in very poor health. Together with his daughter, he decides to go to Lisbon, full of hope that he will make a full and speedy recovery there. Beforehand arrangements are made with Henry, his daughter's fiancé, for him to join them later in Lisbon. It so happens that the diseased Constant and his daughter as well as Henry are carried off as captives by Algerine corsairs.

The story of this war-torn and captive family deserves to be analyzed in detail for its ideological purports. In the first place, it should be noted that this imagined reunion of the family sounds politically loaded. The year of 1794 when the play was written and performed saw a rapprochement between Britain and the United States that ended with what would come to be called the Jay Treaty, which in one of its initial provisions commits Britain to help with the release of the American captives from Algiers. At the time, the Federalists, a huge number of whom were anglophiles, were steering the ship of State at whose helm we find John Adams. The Republican or Anti-Federalist opposition described by history books as mostly Anglophobe and pro-French was very critical of this Anglo-American rapprochement for fear of being entangled in the Anglo-French War on the side of the British, forgetting the ideal of republicanism for which, in their minds, France then stood. Placed in this context, it is clearly obvious that Rowson has Federalist ideological leanings since the Constant family that she imagines to have been reunited in captivity in Algiers is an Anglo-Saxon family. For the British-born Rowson, this imagined family reunion puts an end to the long, heated controversy over an alleged complicit role that Britain, through its Consul in Algiers, Charles Logie, might have played in the two rounds of capture of 1785 and 1793.

However, we would argue that the issue of the definition of the inalienable right of freedom, and the way it must be performed in both the private and public spheres is much more prominent in the family romance recounted by Rebecca. Through the latter character, Rowson rethinks the prevalent ideology of Republican motherhood that confined women in the passive role of wife and mother. We hear of Rebecca in Act I, Scene I, through Fetnah, who avows that she has "nourished in my mind the love of liberty, and taught me, woman was never formed to be the abject slave of man. (p.16)" When she appears on the stage in Scene II of the same Act, she takes to task Ben Hassan her captor for confusing licentiousness with the notion of freedom.

Conclusion

It follows from the analysis above that Rowson has taken American captivity in Algiers as a pretext to raise the issue of gender equality in the United States. Her heroines are, to use Bakhtin's words in another context, ideological heroines, which as mouthpieces of the author defend the political and civil rights of women in the new republic. In this stance, Rowson expresses in her own medium what Abigail Adams, in a letter addressed to her husband in March 1776: "In the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies." In the same letter, Abigail Adams issues a warning that Rowson seem to have heeded in her play: "If peculiar care and attention is not paid to the ladies we are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws, in which we have no voice, or Representation" (As cited in Norton, et al. 1991: 109).

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