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Considerations on the Setting of Cervantes's Captivity Narratives

Jae Won Chang

Research Institute of Humanities Convergence, Korea University, Seoul 02841, Republic of Korea; jjww@korea.ac.kr

Abstract: This study aims to explore the issues of Islamophobia and Christian ideology prevalent in Spanish society in the 16th and early 17th centuries by examining the slave trade conducted by Barbary corsairs and the hard lives of Christian captives depicted in the literary works of Miguel de Cervantes, and to highlight his efforts to overcome the clash of civilizations between Christianity and Islam. To achieve this goal, first, the study delves into the historical context of the clash between Spain and Islam in the Mediterranean during the 16th century. Cervantes, who took part in the Battle of Lepanto in 1571, was captured by Barbary corsairs on his return from military service and spent five years as a captive in the Bagnio of Algiers. The painful experience left indelible marks on his works. This study focuses on the dual meaning of Orientalism in his works. One prevalent form of Orientalism in Spain and Europe during that period portrayed Muslims as barbaric and anti-Christian. However, Cervantes presented an alternative Orientalism to propose a pathway to co-existence, rather than conflict, between civilizations and religions. Therefore, this study explores how Cervantes, even though he himself was a victim of the clash of civilizations, sought to overcome the confrontations and conflicts in his works, rather than perpetuating the prevalent Islamophobia of his time.

Keywords: Cervantes; Mediterranean pirate; Christian captivity narrative; orientalism; white mythology; imperialism

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1. Introduction

The aim of this study is to shed light on the ideology of Christianity towards Islam as depicted in the works of Miguel de Cervantes (1547–1616) by examining the representation of the lives of Christian captives and slaves captured by Barbary corsairs, as well as the images of Islam and Muslims. Cervantes, the author of *Don Quixote*, the first modern novel, frequently explores the theme of captivity in his narratives. Cervantes describes himself in the preface to *Novelas ejemplares* (1613) as follows: "This is the appearance of the author of La Galatea and of Don Quixote de la Mancha, [...] who is commonly called Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. He was a soldier for many years and a captive for five and a half, when he learned to be patient in adversity" (Cervantes 2016, p. 3). In 1570, Cervantes joined the Tercio, Spanish elite military units, and was wounded and disabled in the Battle of Lepanto in 1571, the greatest triumph for the Christian world in the 16th century. On his way home from military service, his ship, El Sol, was captured by three pirate ships off the coast of Catalonia, Spain, led by Arnaut Mamí, a Barbary pirate of Albanian origin, and he was taken to a Christian captives' prison in Algiers for five years (Canavaggio 1990; Abi-Ayad 1995; Garcés 2002; de Riquer 2005).[1]

Since the subject of captivity and the slave trade in Cervantes's works are the product of his vivid and painful experiences at the Bagnio, or prison for Christian slaves in Algiers,[2] unlike other writers who wrote dramatic works with fragmentary information to attract public interest, his works depict the reality of Islam and Barbary pirates in detail, and contain deep insights into the lives of Christian captives. Critics point out that Cervantes's captivity in Algiers is a central experience that divides his life into before and after, and has greatly influenced his works (Zamora Vicente 1950; Garcés 2002). Cervantes's works

on the subject of captivity include *Los tratos de Argel* (1583),[3] plays such as *El gallardo español*, *Los baños de Argel* and *La gran sultana Doña Catalina de Oviedo* in *Ocho comedias y ocho entremeses nuevos nunca representados* (1615), *El amante liberal* and *La española inglesa* in *Novelas ejemplares*, and his last novel *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda, historia septentrional* (1617).[4] In addition, even though it is not an independent work, the interpolated and autobiographical tale of the Christian captain captive in *Don Quixote* is also indispensable for his captivity narratives. Therefore, it is necessary to examine how Muslims, Barbary pirates, and the Ottoman Empire are portrayed in the works of Cervantes, a patriotic veteran soldier who participated in anti-piracy operations and suffered from captivity. Through this analysis, I will explore whether his captivity narratives serve as a means of expanding Islamophobia and Western-centered "white mythology", or as a means of reflecting on and transcending the blindness of his time.

2. The Rise of Mediterranean Piracy during the 16th and 17th Centuries: Historical Context

Piracy in the Mediterranean has roots dating back to at least the 14th century BC and was already a serious social problem, even in Greek and Roman times (Konstam 1999; Stock 2011). However, it should be noted that piracy, originally relatively concentrated in the eastern Mediterranean until the 15th century, spread westward, particularly from the Aegean Sea to the Barbary Coast of North Africa in the 16th century. The affected area also expanded from countries along the Balkan Peninsula to Spain, as well as to Portugal and France, encompassing all European coasts including those of Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Iceland. This expansion was viewed by many as a confrontation between Europe and the non-European world (the Middle East and North Africa), and between Christianity and Islam. Pirates indiscriminately kidnapped and sold valuable goods, as well as travelers and coastal residents. According Robert C. Davis, between 1530 and 1780, more than 1 million to 1.25 million Europeans were enslaved by Muslim pirates (Davis 2003). These facts have shaped the view that Barbary pirates under Ottoman protection were ruthless outlaws, while Europeans were seen as innocent victims. Yet, the reality is more complex. Many pirates of the period were not merely raiders but licensed privateers, operating in a legal gray area between outright piracy and official naval service. Fernand Braudel observed that before the 17th century, the terms *piracy* and *pirates* were hardly used; *privateers* or *corsairs* were the more common terms. *Privateering* was deemed a legitimate form of warfare, authorized through formal declarations of war or letters of marque, passports, and commissions. This practice, prevalent in the Mediterranean, was seen as an ancient form of piracy. By the 16th century, Spaniards differentiated between Barbary *corsairs* in the Mediterranean and French, English, and Dutch *pirates* in the Atlantic. This distinction highlighted Spain's endeavor to condemn all maritime robbery as dishonorable, recognizing that what had once been considered legitimate privateering had evolved into an unofficial and unchecked conflict against Spain's trade and interests (Braudel 1995b). The fundamental issue is not the definition of terms but the nature of piracy in the 16th-century Mediterranean, which Braudel described as a secondary form of war, especially between Spain and the Ottoman Empire. At the heart of this issue lay Ottoman expansionary policies. Sultan Mehmet II (r. 1444–1446, 1451–1481), who conquered Constantinople in 1453 and made it the capital of his own empire, aimed to assert his claim to the legacy of the Roman Empire by expanding beyond the caliphate of the Islamic world. Suleiman I (r. 1520–1566), known as Suleiman the Magnificent, pursued a dual strategy to fulfill the legacy of his ancestors: on one front, he conquered Hungary and laid siege to Vienna, the seat of the Habsburgs, challenging his rival Charles V, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and King of Spain. Concurrently, Suleiman strategically utilized control over North African city-states, ranging from Egypt to Algeria, to threaten Spanish interests along the Mediterranean coast. In this context, the Sultan implicitly supported and empowered Barbary pirates by appointing their captains as naval officials or governors

in those regions.[5] Examples include the legendary pirate brothers Barbarossa and Murat Reis, who were appointed admirals of the Ottoman Navy.

However, the rise of Muslim piracy in the Mediterranean during the 16th century cannot solely be attributed to the Ottoman Empire. The Barbary Coast of North Africa became a notorious haven for pirates, due in part to the expulsion and persecution of Muslims and Jews from Spain. Following the conquest of Granada, the final Islamic kingdom on the Iberian Peninsula, in 1492, Spanish monarchs disregarded the *Capitulations of Santa Fe*, which had guaranteed religious freedom, tolerance, and peaceful co-existence. This abandonment led to the forced conversion of Muslims and Jews to Christianity under the "purity of blood" laws ("limpieza de la sangre"), the confiscation of their property, and severe discriminations on their social activities. They were subjected to ongoing surveillance and oppression (Elliott [1963] 2002; Catlos 2018). Many exiles fled across the Strait of Gibraltar to settle on the North African coast, where some resorted to piracy, posing a direct threat to the Spanish and Christians who had expelled them. This phenomenon was also evident among exiled Jews (Elliott [1963] 2002).[6] Concerned about a possible alliance with the Ottoman Empire, which was becoming a dominant power in the Mediterranean, Ferdinand II established presidios in North Africa by taking control of several strategic sites: Melilla, Mers El Kébir, Peñón de Vélez, Oran, Bougie, Tripoli, and Algiers (Elliott [1963] 2002; Barton [2004] 2009). Unlike Queen Isabella, who had advocated and subscribed "unremittingly to the conquest of Africa and to the war for the Faith against the Moors", Ferdinand II opted for maintaining garrisons to defend Spain against potential Moorish aggression, rather than pursuing an expansive military campaign (Elliott [1963] 2002). Ironically, Spain's policy of limited military occupation inadvertently contributed to the pirates' expansion of their base to the nearby Barbary Coast instead of consolidating control over occupied territories. This area evolved into a significant launching point for attacks on Spain's vital Mediterranean trade routes (Elliott [1963] 2002). Algeria came under the influence of the Ottoman Empire when the Greek pirate Aruj Barbarossa seized Algiers in 1516, and later, the Barbarossa brothers captured Peñón d'Algiers in 1529. In 1534, Hayreddin Barbarossa, his younger brother, took Tunis, then under Spanish protection, significantly diminishing Spain's presence in North Africa (Konstam 1999; Bunes Ibarra 2023). The following year, Charles V's expedition briefly retook Tunis, but Spain missed a crucial opportunity to eradicate Mediterranean pirates by hesitating to attack Algiers, their stronghold. As a result, Spain lost control of the Mediterranean for decades.[7] After his victory at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571, Philip II temporarily succeeded by dispatching an expedition led by Cervantes to Bizerte and La Golette in Tunisia in 1573 (Fernández Álvarez [1998] 2002). However, due to conflicts across Europe, the pirates, supported by the Ottoman Empire, quickly regrouped and became even more audacious and ruthless. Just two months before Cervantes' release in 1580, Spain and the Ottoman Empire declared a ceasefire and reconciled after lengthy negotiations, but this did not bring complete peace to the Mediterranean. The ceasefire agreement applied only to the two empires and did not extend to the city states of the Barbary Coast in North Africa under Ottoman rule. Consequently, pirates in these regions operated with increased impunity in the absence of Ottoman control. To fully understand Mediterranean piracy, it is crucial to adopt a comprehensive approach that integrates Spain's oppressive policies against Muslims and Jews with the Ottoman Empire's expansionist ambitions and Islamic militancy. These interconnected factors cannot be separated, much like the two sides of a coin. Fernand Braudel emphasized this perspective:

> The story of the Mediterranean in the sixteenth century is in the first place a story of dramatic political growth, with the leviathans taking up their positions. [. . .] So the rise of empires in the Mediterranean means essentially that of the Ottoman Empire in the East and that of the Habsburg Empire in the West. [. . .] the emergence of these twin powers constitutes a single chapter in history and before going any further let us stress that accident and circumstance did not

> preside alone at the birth of these simultaneous additions to the great powers of history. (Braudel 1995b, p. 660)

The expansionist ambitions of these empires inevitably led to conflict, which fueled the rise of Barbary pirates in the 16th century. The Ottoman Empire's westward push to reclaim former Roman territories clashed with Spain's eastward expansion within the Mediterranean, as Spain sought to dominate both the New World and the western Mediterranean shores of Europe. Elliott highlighted the rise of imperialism in Spain:

> It was at this point that Charles's Imperialism came into its own. An empire was wanted to meet the attack of an empire. [. . .] Charles's imperialism provided exactly this. He could draw on the financial and military resources of his widespread dominions, on the naval power of Genoese allies, and on the loans of his German bankers, to defend Italy and Sicily, and hence Spain itself, against the onslaught of Ottoman imperialism. (Elliott [1963] 2002, pp. 168–69)

It is essential to examine imperialism not only as a political strategy but also from a cultural perspective. This is particularly relevant in the era of Cervantes, who lived in Spain during its Golden Age, which spanned the reigns of Charles V (r. 1516–1556), Philip II (r. 1556–1598), and Philip III (r. 1598–1621), a period when the Spanish Empire reached its zenith, famously described as "the empire on which the sun never sets". During Spain's rise to empire in this era, it was no coincidence that chivalric romances flourished, glorifying the conquest of pagans in the name of God and the pursuit of wealth, love, and honor. This period marked the sophisticated emergence of imperialism. *Amadis de Gaula* (1508), one of the most renowned chivalric romances of its time, propagated Christian ideology among Europeans, including Spaniards, inspiring them to venture into unknown lands, conquer, and govern under the symbol of the cross. Even Charles V, a fervent reader of *Amadis de Gaula*—an epic poem celebrating love and noble Christian knights—vowed to emulate Amadis' valor. Similarly, religious figures like Ignatius of Loyola and Teresa of Ávila, conquistadors such as Hernán Cortés, and scholars and writers like Juan de Valdés and Cervantes were captivated by the book (Blanco Aguinaga et al. [1978] 2000). Bernal Díaz del Castillo, who accompanied Hernán Cortés in the conquest of the Aztecs, said: "We came here to serve God and the king, and also to get rich" (Elliott [1963] 2002). This suggests that a widespread imperialistic desire to conquer and dominate others was at play. Such imperialism was characterized by the argument that Europeans and Christians, deemed superior and civilized, should conquer and civilize others considered barbarians and inferior. An iconic event illustrating Spanish imperialist discourse is the Valladolid Debate, held at the Colegio de San Gregorio in Valladolid from 1550 to 1551. The debate featured Bartolomé de las Casas, a Dominican friar, and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, a prominent humanist and Thomist of the time. It marked the world's first debate on the human rights and treatment of Native Indians in the New World, centering on whether the natives should be subjects of edification and missionary work, or objects of conquest and exploitation (Carrière 1999; Elliott [1963] 2002). Essentially, it questioned how Europeans and Christians viewed others' human rights, dignity, and freedoms.

From the perspective of today's universal human rights, Friar Las Casas's passionate advocacy for the human rights of Indians in the New World seems to have prevailed. However, his suggestion that physically robust African people were better suited for labor inadvertently contributed to the emergence of the Atlantic slave trade. In Cervantes's works, do we find such imperialistic logic prevailing or humanistic criticism? In the following section, we will focus on the captivity narratives, particularly those depicted in works such as *Los tratos de Argel*, *La gran sultana Doña Catalina de Oviedo*, *El amante liberal*, and *La española inglesa*.

3. Exploring Settings in Cervantes's Captivity Narratives

According to Dahia Messara, "captivity is the act of physical imprisonment of individuals by a hostile group, motivated by various political, social, and religious reasons. Another underlying common denominator is the tendency among former captives to record

their unique and life-altering experiences. The wish to document the ordeal has been shared by many freed captives throughout history—the more famous among them include Miguel Cervantes, Cabeza de Vaca, and Mary Rowlandson" (Messara 2012). Summarizing her arguments, captivity narratives can be defined as stories or records of suffering and trials where innocent individuals are abruptly kidnapped, detained, or even sold as slaves by enemy groups. The captivity narratives could take the form of diaries, memoirs, novels, or plays. Most commonly, they depict the perilous adventure of being forcefully captured by culturally and socially unfamiliar intruders, often portrayed as barbaric and violent, with the protagonist struggling desperately to survive unfair and inhumane treatment. Therefore, in captivity narratives, we can gain insight into how the kidnapped protagonist perceived their "other"—the kidnappers and their society. Moreover, the captivity narratives reveal the cultural shocks and gaps that arise from living in environments that are completely unfamiliar and foreign. Additionally, they explore the kind of self-consciousness the protagonist develops about themselves and the society to which they belong.

Armando Cotarelo Valledor argued that "Cervantes was the first writer to introduce the subject of captivity into Spanish drama" (Cotarelo y Valledor 1915). Although his argument was later refuted by subsequent researchers,[8] Camamis asserts that it cannot be denied that Cervantes is the most innovative writer of captivity-themed literature (Camamis 1977; García Arenal and Bunes Ibarra 1992). Cervantes's captivity narratives are set in various parts of the Mediterranean and explore the lives of people from different social classes who were captured and held by pirates in various situations. What sets Cervantes's captivity narratives apart from simple records of imprisonment is his pursuits of more sublime and universal values, such as "love" and "the struggle for freedom", enriched by his imagination. As a result, these horrific and painful personal experiences were transformed into adventurous tales similar to the *Odyssey*.

Cervantes's profound and extensive knowledge of the Mediterranean region, gained through both military service and personal experience as a captive, enriches the verisimilitude of his narratives. His works traverse the diverse landscapes of the Mediterranean, spanning the Eastern Mediterranean, Western Mediterranean, Southern Mediterranean, and the intricate trans-Mediterranean regions. Fernand Braudel aptly characterized the Mediterranean not as a single sea, but as a mosaic of interconnected seas.[9] Geographically, the Mediterranean is delineated into distinct zones: the Eastern Mediterranean with its focus on Turkey, Greece, and the Aegean Sea; the Central Mediterranean centered around Italy, Spain, and France; the Western Mediterranean; and the Southern Mediterranean along the North African coast. Cervantes's works vividly capture these regional nuances.

For example, *La gran sultana* and *El amante liberal* were set in the Levant region of the Ottoman Empire, representing the eastern Mediterranean backdrop. In contrast, *Los tratos de Argel*, *El gallardo español*, and *Los baños de Argel* depicted the lives of Christian slaves or captives from the Barbary Coast, specifically from cities like Algiers and Oran, showcasing the southern Mediterranean environment. On a different note, *La española inglesa* recounted the tale of a Spanish girl abducted by British privateers and taken to London, shifting the stage from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. Even in *Don Quixote* and *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda*, Cervantes weaved tales that traverse multiple Mediterranean locales, which can be categorized as "trans-Mediterranean" or "ultra-Mediterranean" settings.

3.1. Captivity Narratives in the Southern Mediterranean Setting: Focusing on Los Tratos de Argel

Among the works set in the Southern Mediterranean, geographically close to Spain, *El gallardo español* unfolds in Oran, which is its central stage, while *Los tratos de Argel* and *Los baños de Argel* are set in Algiers. In the Cervantine world, Algiers, where he was detained for over five years, serves as the focal point of many of his works (Abi-Ayad 1995), even when it was not the primary setting, as in the aforementioned pieces. In *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda*, for example, Algiers is powerfully mentioned as "the gluttonous battle-axe and hag's mouth of all the Mediterranean Sea's shores, the corsairs' general command post, and

harbor and haven for thieves" (Cervantes 2023, p. 236). This characterization underscores Algiers as the epicenter of Cervantes's deep-seated trauma.

Cervantes's experiences during his captivity in Algiers were meticulously documented in the *Información de Argel* (1580). Shortly after his release from the *baño* or dungeon in Algiers, Cervantes requested Friar Juan Gil, a Trinitarian monk responsible for negotiating the ransom and rescue of Christian captives, to record the testimonies of his fellow captives regarding his conduct during their shared ordeal. Between 10 and 22 October 1580, under Friar Juan Gil's supervision, the testimonies of thirteen Spanish Christian captives were collected, detailing twenty-five aspects of Cervantes's activities in Algiers. These testimonies were recorded and notarized by the scribe Pedro de Rivera and compiled into the *Información de Argel*, a copy of which was given to Cervantes. It was common practice at that time for rescued captives to obtain such documents as proof of their honorable conduct during captivity, which could be used if their character was later questioned or challenged (Piras 2004). In this sense, the *Información de Argel* serves as both an archival record (Ruan 2021) and a legal document (Soler 2016). The document provides a detailed account of the persecution of Christian captives in Algiers, Cervantes's relentless efforts to escape with his Christian companions, the suffering he endured due to the betrayal by Spanish renegades like Juan Blanco de Paz, who had converted to Islam, and Cervantes's courage and heroism in defending his Christian faith (Sola 2007, 2012). Though initially intended as a legal document, the *Información de Argel* also became foundational for Cervantes's later literary works on captivity in North Africa. In *The Captive's Tale*, an autobiographical short story interpolated in Part I of *Don Quixote*, Cervantes offers a stark depiction of the harsh realities faced by Christian captives in Algiers:

> "Thus I made a shift to support life, shut up in a prison or house, which the Turks call a bath, where they keep their Christian captives locked up, [. . .] As they knew I had been a captain, I was one upon ransom; and though I assured them I wanted both interest and money, it did not hinder me from being put among the gentlemen, and those who were to be ransomed. They put a chain on me, rather as a sign of ransom than to secure me"; (Cervantes 2008, p. 353)

According to Ellen Friedman, the harsh treatment of Christian captives was not merely a matter of chains and indignities; it was a deliberate tactic to maximize ransoms. She explained, "their captors thought it would be easier to obtain high prices for important captives if they were kept in miserable surroundings" (Friedman 1983, p. 71). However, the real torment went beyond the physical discomfort and humiliation. The excessive and brutal treatment meted out to them solely because of their Christian faith was particularly harrowing.

> And though hunger and nakedness often, and indeed generally afflicted us, nothing troubled us so much as to see, at every turn, the unparalleled and excessive cruelties with which our master used the Christians. Each day he hung one, impaled another, and cut off the ears of a third; and that upon the least provocation, and sometimes none at all, insomuch that the very Turks were sensible he did it for the mere pleasure of doing it, and to gratify his murderous and inhuman disposition. (Cervantes 2008, pp. 353–54)

These accounts of brutality resonate with the testimonies included in the *Información de Argel*. Cervantes, himself, was at risk of execution after multiple failed escape attempts during his five-year captivity (Sola 2012). In *The Captive's Tale*, Cervantes condemned the brutality of the Muslim masters of Algiers, many of whom were descendants of Muslims expelled from Spain. He vividly depicted the suffering of Christian slaves and appealed to the Spanish public to address the ongoing plight of the many Christian captives still held in Algiers. Cervantes's first play after his own rescue, *Los tratos de Argel*, opens with the lamentation of Aurelio, a Christian slave painfully walking in chains.

> Woeful and sorrowful estate!/Hard and bitter servitude!/As the suffering is extensive,/the good how little and how much abridged!/O purgatory in life

itself!/Infernal regions planted here on earth,/Evil inferior to none,/A strait without an exit!/ (Cervantes 2014, p. 147)

Stanislav Zimic explored this connection by drawing parallels with Canto III of Dante's *Divina Commedia* (Zimic 1992). In *Los tratos de Argel*, Christian slaves endured relentless persecution by the Moors, tyrannical overlords who exploited them as objects of desire. One poignant example recounts the martyrdom of a Valencian friar, publicly executed and burned solely because of his identity as a Valencian priest (Ohanna 2014).[10] Cervantes, who witnessed such atrocities first-hand, denounced the barbarism of using an innocent person as a scapegoat for personal vendettas. In the second act, a tragic scene unfolded where Christian families were sold at auction in the slave market and forcibly separated. The anguish of a Christian mother was palpable as she lamented, "Oh, terrible crisis! Bitter far than death!" (Cervantes 2014, p. 165). *Los tratos de Argel* profoundly depicts the extreme suffering experienced by Christian prisoners in Algiers, where the Muslim masters were morally corrupt, driven by greed and lust. Zara, a Moorish mistress, desires her Spanish slave Aurelio, while her husband, Izuf, covets Aurelio's lover Silvia, attempting to seduce them and take their bodies, souls, and even their faith. In Algiers, as the number of Christian captives increased, so did the number of the renegades. The conversion occurred either due to the semi-coercive methods and violence employed by their Muslim masters, or voluntarily for socio-economic benefits. In 1580, the renegade population in Algiers numbered about 6000, and by 1630 it had surpassed 9000 (de Sosa 2011). Other estimates suggest that, at its peak, renegades represented between a quarter and a third of the Christian captives (García Arenal and Bunes Ibarra 1992). Many of these renegades had initially been Spanish Christian captives, and some of them deceitfully and hypocritically posed as Christians to other Christian captives (Sola and de la Peña [1995] 1996). Nevertheless, some renegades later repented their conversion to Islam and sought to return to Christianity. Similar to Saavedra in *Los tratos de Argel*, Cervantes motivated these individuals to reconnect with their Christian faith. In *Los tratos de Argel*, Cervantes adeptly depicts Christian captives in the "baño" as martyrs who maintained their faith and identity, despite severe persecution. He represents Algiers as a battleground where corrupt Islam clashed with the resilient resistance of Christianity. Those who sought to impose Islam through coercion and seduction were met with the unyielding resistance of Christian captives, who held fast to their faith and patriotism. This depiction reflects Cervantes's view of their struggle as a form of crusade. As Joaquín Casalduero pointed out, one of the central themes of *Los tratos de Argel* is encapsulated in the phrase "to lose the soul, to lose the life" (perder el alma, perder la vida) (Casalduero 1974). This phrase may have provided some Christian captives enduring imprisonment and suffering in Algiers with a sense of solace amidst their harsh reality. In his works set in the Southern Mediterranean, such as *Los tratos de Argel* and *El gallardo español*, Cervantes contrasts the virtuous and noble Christian slaves of Spain with the greedy, cowardly, and corrupt Muslim rulers who deceived, betrayed, or mistreated them. Through this stark contrast, Cervantes aimed to evoke the suffering of Hebrew slaves during the Babylonian captivity and, like Dante in his *Divina Commedia*, to caution against the peril of losing one's devout Christian faith. Nevertheless, Cervantes did not harbor a blanket animosity towards all Muslims. In *The Captive's Tale*, interpolated in *Don Quixote*, Zoraida, a Moorish young lady, is depicted as a righteous and pious figure. Motivated by her Christian faith, she aids the captive Ruy Pérez de Viedma in his escape and accompanies him to Spain, the land of Christendom, where she becomes a Christian. Thus, in Cervantes's early works, Muslim cities are portrayed as akin to Sodom and Gomorrah, illustrating his view of these places as embodiments of moral decay.

3.2. Captivity Narratives in the Eastern Mediterranean Setting: Focusing on El Amante Liberal and La Gran Sultana

Works set in the Eastern Mediterranean, far removed from Spain, dealt with themes of piracy, slave trading, and love within an exotic milieu, offering a more nuanced and globally informed perspective on Islam and Western civilization compared to works set

in the Southern Mediterranean. Among works set in the Eastern Mediterranean, *La gran sultana* was primarily situated in Constantinople, the heart of the Ottoman Empire, focusing on the sultan's court and the harem where his concubines resided. Constantinople, once the capital of the Byzantine Empire, was a cosmopolitan center that stood as the largest and most prosperous city globally for an extensive period. It served as the epicenter of the Islamic world, a magnificent city where wealth, power, and desire converged. The portrayal of Constantinople in this work was multifaceted: on one hand, it was depicted as an object of fascination and admiration for European Christians; on the other, it was viewed with hatred and contempt as a den of pagans. Among the Christian captives brought there, some yearned to return to their hometowns, others converted to Islam and settled in Constantinople, and some remained unable to leave due to their love with Muslim women, like the case of Madrigal, a supporting actor.

On the contrary, *El amante liberal* formed an organic connection across three Mediterranean locales, primarily centered around Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus under Ottoman rule. While in his play *La gran sultana*, Cervantes adhered to Aristotle's dramatic unity of place, time, and action, with events unfolding solely in Constantinople, *El amante liberal* —diverse free-form scene shifts—featured two distinct settings: Nicosia and Trapani, a port in northern Sicily and the hometown of the protagonists, Ricardo and Leosina, respectively. The narrative also encompassed a journey aboard a ship bound for Constantinople, a backdrop steeped in betrayal, conspiracy, and rebellion. Spanning these three locations, the story depicted the enduring love between Ricardo and Leosina, transcending challenges to find fulfillment. Trapani symbolized a joyous and carefree past, or Utopia, juxtaposed with Nicosia's present-day hardships and enslavement under Muslim rulers, from which Leosina was ultimately liberated. The ship, serving as a vessel sailing toward a hopeful future and a return to happiness, completed the thematic and spatial trinity of this work when, after overcoming the rebellion of Bajas who sought to possess Leosina, the two Christian slave lovers finally arrived in Trapani and fulfilled their love.

Interestingly, *El amante liberal* stood out among Cervantes's works as its protagonists and setting are outside Spain. Both Sicily and Cyprus, where the novel unfolds, were historically under Islamic rule, much like Cervantes' native Spain, which remained so until 1492. Sicily was conquered by Arabs from Tunis in 827 and was ruled by them for about two centuries. Similarly, Cyprus was initially part of the Byzantine Empire but fell under Venetian control from 1489 until it was invaded by the Ottoman army in July 1570. During the invasion, which lasted 45 days, a large number of Nicosia's residents were killed, and the city was seized. Cervantes, who had served in the military in Naples from around 1570, was well aware of the fall of Nicosia and was familiar with Trapani because his troops had been stationed in Sicily during the winter of 1572 (Belloso Martín 2016). In this novel, Cervantes united the diverse regions of the Mediterranean as a cohesive community. He recounted the travails and romances of Sicilian protagonists from the Central Mediterranean, who were enslaved and taken to Nicosia in the Eastern Mediterranean, sharing these stories with Spaniards residing in the Western Mediterranean. However, during that period, many Spaniards were reluctant to bear the high costs and actively engage in the affairs of Italy and Europe following Charles V's ascension to the throne. They believed that "Castile's interests required peace in Europe and a continuation of the crusade against the infidel along the shore of Africa" (Elliott [1963] 2002). Many Spaniards at that time were reluctant to become involved in European conflicts, viewing them as irrelevant to their own interests. In contrast, Cervantes challenged this passive outlook vigorously. He argued fervently that Sicily, Naples, and the Duchy of Milan were crucial Spanish territories, advocating for unity among Spain and Mediterranean nations to counter the Ottoman Empire's expansion and foster harmonious co-existence (Garcés 2021). Therefore, compared to earlier works set in the Southern Mediterranean, this captivity narrative expanded its canvas of events significantly. Maria Antonia Garcés lauded this work as the most audacious among exemplary novels from a geopolitical perspective (Garcés 2021).

However, *La gran sultana* transcended conventional socio-cultural boundaries. Written around 1607–08, it presented a nuanced portrayal of Muslims and Islam. While captivity narratives set in the Southern Mediterranean depicted Christian captives enduring misery, insulted as "dogs", and pressured or seduced into apostasy, *La gran sultana* introduced a more intricate perspective of the Ottoman Empire. On the journey from Malaga to Oran, a Spanish girl of exceptional beauty, accompanied by her parents, was captured by the notorious pirate Morato Arráez and enslaved in the Sultan's harem. Thus began the tale of Doña Catalina de Oviedo, a fictional Spanish lady thrust into the harem of Murad III. Astonishingly, without renouncing her Christian faith, she captivated the Sultan's heart, becoming his first legal wife and gaining influence to rescue other Christian slaves in dire straits. Barbara Fuchs and Aaron J. Ilika identified the Sultan in this narrative as Murad III, the 12th Sultan of the Ottoman Empire (Cervantes 2010). The Sultan was known for elevating Safiye Sultan, an Albanian slave, to the position of his first concubine (Haseki Sultan), who later bore his successor, Mehmed III. Similarly, Suleiman I, revered as the great Sultan, favored Roxelane, a Polish slave, elevating her to the status of his first consort. Cervantes masterfully integrates these historical figures into a romantic captivity narrative depicting transcendent love between Catalina de Oviedo, a Christian slave from Spain, and the Turkish Sultan. However, their religious differences emerge as a profound obstacle to their love story in the first two acts of *La gran sultana*. Enchanted by her beauty, the Sultan proposed marriage, but Doña Catalina adamantly refused, asserting she could not forsake her faith and would willingly embrace martyrdom instead. She said:

> I am a Christian, so much so that I will not change my faith for a million promises, nor the threat of death. [. . .] Where, my lord, has anyone seen two in a bed, one who holds Mohammed in his heart, and the other Christ? Your desires do not measure up to your supreme valor, for Love cannot bring together two people divided by their faiths. Stick to your nobility, your rites, and your sect, for it's not right for them to mingle with my faith and my baseness. (Cervantes 2010, p. 118)

The Sultan, increasingly captivated by her confident and dignified demeanor, permitted her to become his first consort while maintaining her Christian faith. Moreover, the Great Turk declared that he would become her slave and serve her for the rest of his life.

> I am your circumference, and you, my lady, are my center; [. . .] humbling myself at your feet, I raise you to my head. We are equal now. (Cervantes 2010, p. 118)

> Love makes you one with majesty. I see all of my kingdoms, which are nearly infinite, delivered to your jurisdiction; [. . .] since you control me, it's fitting you should control the world. I don't care if you're a Muslim or a Christian; this beauty is my wife, and henceforth the Great Sultana. (Cervantes 2010, p. 118)

This portrayal of the Islamic caliph was a complete inversion of the cruel and ruthless despot that most Spaniards believed him to be. Instead, he was depicted as a romantic man who was open, generous, wise, and completely devoted to his sincere and pure love. The Sultan's emphasis on the power of love and his declaration of becoming her slave reflected aspects of Western courtly love, presenting a new and subverted image of the Islamic world.

> Raise your voices, lads; may the Great Sultana Dona Catalina be praised—the Great Sultana and a Christian, glory and honor of her tender and Christian years, honor of her nation and homeland! May God make her desires so just and holy that a new and true history may be written of her liberty and memory. (Cervantes 2010, p. 169)

On the surface, *La gran sultana* celebrated Christianity and Spain's triumph over Islam and the Ottoman Empire, as echoed through the songs of Christian slaves. The atmosphere of this captivity narrative was vividly depicted as exotic, joyful, humorous, vibrant, and lively, while the Sultan was portrayed as honest, sincere, wise, and majestic. This cultivated ambiance served to magnify the conqueror's pride and jubilation in victory, emphasized by the marriage of Doña Catalina to the Sultan, which would suggest to the Spanish audience

that the Sultan could be seen as their neighbor, relative, or even son-in-law. The grandeur of the Islamic Empire and the Sultan, destined to be conquered and subdued by Doña Catalina, a daughter of Spain, could fuel the Spanish imagination. It would lead them to envision that, according to Spanish descendants, the Islamic empire would eventually become a colony of Spain someday—a colonial desire, nonetheless. However, paradoxically, beneath this façade, *La gran sultana* subtly suggested that the Islamic world demonstrated greater tolerance, diversity, and openness compared to the Christian world. Therefore, it covertly criticized the intolerance and rigidity inherent in Christianity. In *La gran sultana*, we encounter two conflicting Orientalist perspectives.

> Orientalism is a way of coming to terms with Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture. (Said [1977] 1994, pp. 1–2)

Edward Said described Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient, and the European perception of "us" vs. "them", viewing Europe as superior to non-European peoples and cultures (Said [1977] 1994). He argued that European superiority has been perpetuated through this framework (Said [1977] 1994). In *La gran sultana*, Christianity appeared to triumph over Islam through the power of love. However, the work portrays Christianity as an uncompromising faith unafraid of martyrdom, a characteristic typical of the Orientalism Said critiques. It reflects the belief that as Christians and Europeans, "I" and "we" are inherently right, and our faith is superior. This mindset justifies "our" dominance over the Islamic Sultanate, enabling the spread of "our" physical, intellectual, and religious influence across pagan lands. The exclamation "Long live Spain!" epitomizes the primary orientalism depicted in this work.

However, the Sultan embodies his belief in pure love by asserting that worldly concerns such as religious differences and nationality should not obstruct his genuine affection for her. His perspective prompts us to consider whether Islamic society demonstrates greater flexibility and tolerance than Christian society, which frequently judges and imposes its beliefs on others, potentially complicating peaceful co-existence. In *La gran sultana*, when Doña Catalina's father reunited with her in Constantinople almost ten years after she was captured by pirates, he sternly scolded her. "You must realize, to your disadvantage, that you are in a state of mortal sin, my daughter. Look to your state, and to how you conduct yourself, for it is full of troubles, though it might seem good" (Cervantes 2010, pp. 146–47). Her father, a deeply religious and conservative man from a Spanish noble family (Hidalgo), had believed her to be dead rather than having surrendered to Islam. Therefore, his first words upon seeing her again were devoid of fatherly love, neither greeting her nor expressing comfort. Instead, he immediately admonished her: "Hope, not fear, is what I advise, for the highest power of God cannot be reduced. Confidence in Him, I find, is the way out of this maze; but should it be by death instead, don't run from it, be steadfast?" (Cervantes 2010, p. 148). This response reflected the prevailing Christian ideology of the 16th and 17th centuries, where martyrdom and maintaining Christian honor were considered more honorable than apostatizing or living in servitude under Islamic rule. Doña Catalina, in turn, replied: "A thousand times I resolved to die before pleasing him; a thousand times, to anger him, I disdained his courtesies; but all of my disdain, my scorn, and arrogance just made him hold me in higher esteem. [. . .] is it right for me to kill myself, since they won't kill me? Must I die by my own hand?" (Cervantes 2010, p. 147).

From a human perspective, a stark contrast emerged: her father adopted a stern and corrective attitude, whereas the Sultan exhibited boldness, flexibility, inclusivity, and deep respect. He ardently protected the woman he loves, willingly forfeiting all entitlements. In a notable instance, when a eunuch hailed him with "Long live Muhammad!", his response

resonated with profound significance, "Do not name Mohammed to her, for the Sultana is a Christian. Her name is Doña Catalina, and her last name, de Oviedo—to my advantage, since if it were Moorish, she would never have come into my power, nor would I enjoy the treasure that is her beauty. [. . .]" (Cervantes 2010, p. 132).

In *La gran sultana*, two contrasting discourses clashed: one rooted in the entrenched traditional values of each society, and the other an unconventional, comprehensive discourse that diverged from them. The traditional mindset embodied by Doña Catalina, her father, and the Cadi (Islamic judge) reflected imperialistic ideologies aimed at asserting dominance through force and imposing their own values, thereby positioning others as equals in theory but ultimately as inferior. In contrast, the Sultan's discourse of love departed from conventional and rigid thinking, seeking co-existence by respecting and embracing others as they are. Through *La gran sultana*, Cervantes depicted Constantinople, once the capital of the Byzantine Empire and now of the Ottoman Empire, as an idealized setting where East and West, Christianity and Islam, converge and combine to create a new world and foster an open society. In this realm, a profound reversal took place: the Sultan surrendered to love's enslavement, while the slave ascended to the throne of love's empress. Here, individuals of diverse social status could come together to love and embrace each other as equals. A place where only love reigns, where all forms of discrimination and prejudice vanish from the world—that is the utopia that Cervantes fervently dreams of. Cervantes crafted an inverted or subverted world through the reversal of social roles, epitomized by the Sultan and Doña Catalina.

While Islamic fundamentalists existed, strictly adhering to Islamic law and disregarding Spanish Christian slaves, "The Sultan's Love" presented an alternative Orientalism—an idealized and captivating portrayal of the Orient. *La gran sultana* served as a counter-discourse, challenging and transcending the traditional, hierarchical, and exclusive imperialist discourses prevalent in the premodern era. By romanticizing the East and the Islamic world, Cervantes aimed to transcend the confrontations and conflicts between Christianity and Islam, as well as between the two empires bordering the Mediterranean. Through its exploration of themes such as love, communication, and mutual understanding, the play portrayed an idealistic journey towards everlasting peace.

As Ottmar Hegyi highlighted, Cortarelo y Valledor acclaimed *La Gran Sultana* as one of Cervantes's most artistically accomplished works. However, Schevill and Bonilla criticized the plot as fantastical ("lo fantástico del argumento"). They also pointed out technical flaws ("lo defectuoso de la técnica") (Ottoma 1992).

What stands out in *La gran sultana* is not merely the commendable Christian virtue of Doña Catalina, the courageous Spanish woman who confronted the Sultan and eventually became his consort, despite the risk of martyrdom. Rather, it is the unconventional and uncommon love of the Sultan, who embraced and cherished her, transcending their religious differences. From a radical perspective, Catalina's acceptance of the Sultan's love and her elevation to consort could be regarded as a form of renegade or apostate. However, the Sultan did not opt for a superficial and frivolous victory over Christianity, his opponent or "other", but instead chose deliberate understanding to foster the co-existence of two religions. Through *La gran sultana*, Cervantes aimed to challenge Western stereotypes or prejudice of Islam and Muslims—commonly known as traditional Orientalism—and advocated for overcoming long-standing antagonisms and conflicts. His aspiration was to promote reconciliation and peaceful co-existence between cultures.

He had already employed a similar narrative structure in the tale of *The Captive Captain* [TCC], interpolated in *Don Quixote*, Volume I (1605). In this episode, a Spanish captive captain, imprisoned in Algiers, escaped with the help of a Moorish woman and married her in Spain. At first glance, *La gran sultana* and TCC might appear to simply change the roles of men and women. TCC told the story of a Spanish male slave gaining freedom with the assistance of a Moorish woman who was a secret Christian seeking to escape to Spain to live as a Christian. Conversely, *La gran sultana* related the story of a Spanish female slave gaining freedom with the help of a male Muslim, in this case the Sultan, who made her

his consort. Superficially, these two works might seem like similar captivity narratives with only the protagonist's gender being changed. However, there is a crucial difference between the two stories. In TCC, the Moorish woman converted to Christianity, resulting in the couple sharing the same faith. In contrast, in *La gran sultana*, the Sultan, the most powerful man in the Islamic world, accepted a Christian woman as his wife, allowing her to retain both her religion and her way of life. These differences highlighted a theme of religious co-existence and tolerance. In TCC, "others" were assimilated completely into the entity of Christianity.

However, *La gran sultana* took a step further by presenting a vision where individuals co-existed while maintaining their own unique lifestyles and religions. This inclusive idea could be seen as disturbing and challenging from the perspective of the Spanish Church and authorities during the times of the Reformation and Inquisition, as they emphasized "la pureza de la sangre" (purity of blood) and persecuted those who were different or belonged to minorities. Yet, Cervantes cleverly embedded a message of tolerance and acceptance within the outward narrative of Christianity's triumph, avoiding the religious fanaticism of his time. Cervantes concealed an idealistic, utopian Orientalism behind the stereotypical image of Islam as ignorant, simplistic, arrogant, and barbaric. By doing so, he challenged the "white mythologies" and Eurocentric Christian ideologies, presenting a utopian world of reconciliation and co-existence between religions. In this world, Muslims are not antichrists to be exterminated, but ordinary human beings with different values, deserving of understanding and compassion. Thus, they become objects of empathy and forgiveness, rather than fear and hatred.

This idea can be found in many of his works. In *Don Quixote*, Volume 2 (1615), Ana Félix, a Morisco woman, pleaded for the innocence of a pirate ship's crew who were about to be executed by the Spanish Navy. She explained: "The rest of the Moors and Turks in the double-banked galley are just rowers" (Cervantes 2008, p. 887). While many people believed that one must "pay for one's sins", Cervantes emphasized that sympathy and compassion for others were more important. In this episode, the general of Barcelona not only heeded Ana Félix's plea by sparing the galley slaves who were merely rowers, but he also demonstrated remarkable clemency by not executing the two Turkish pirates who had killed his men. He thought that vengeance, if not soaked in blood and tears, was not true vengeance. Reflecting the biblical teaching, "But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also" (Matthew 5:38–39), Cervantes likely saw the embodiment of this principle as the essence of true Christianity. Thus, he opposed the prevailing Christian imperialistic idea of conquering and either annihilating or forcibly converting the Islamic world, advocating instead tolerance and co-existence. He believed this approach would break the relentless cycle of revenge and foster peaceful relations between Spain and the Islamic world.

The subtle Orientalism in *La Gran Sultana* was significant not merely for representing Islam as an exotic "other", but for recognizing Islam as the authentic counterpart to European civilization—a partner deserving of dialogue, compromise, and mutual respect. This nuanced Orientalism, beyond the surface-level glamorization of Islam, reflected Cervantes's critical perspective as an intellectual who transcended the prevalent biases and fervor of his time.

3.3. Captivity Narratives in Trans-Mediterranean or Ultra-Mediterranean Settings: Focusing on La Española Inglesa

La española inglesa or "The Spanish English Woman" diverges significantly from the captivity narratives involving Barbary pirates discussed earlier. Firstly, this novel revolved around the plunder and abduction of civilians in Cadiz, Spain, by the British Navy, rather than by Muslim pirates, shifting the central setting from the Mediterranean to London, England, and the Atlantic Ocean. Secondly, it portrays a British nobleman who clandestinely abducts a Spanish girl as a trophy, raising her with care, akin to his daughter, and ultimately permitting her to marry his son. In *La española inglesa*, which deviated from

typical captivity narratives, Cervantes delved deeply into the lives of European corsairs and their captives, prompting reflections on several questions. Who is the real pirate: the gentle and noble man who besieged a foreign city and abducted of his own volition, or the stereotypical outlaw of the Barbary coast? How did European plunder and invasion differ from Muslim piracy? What differences existed between the harsh conditions of captivity in Algiers and the "imprisonment" in an affluent aristocratic household in London, where she was compelled to assimilate as an Englishwoman, separated from her parents and devoid of free will?

In *La española inglesa,* Cervantes challenged the Eurocentric perspectives prevalent among Europeans of his time. Similar to *El amante liberal* and *La gran sultana* discussed earlier, this novel was grounded in historical events—the English Navy's sack of the Spanish port city of Cádiz between 30 June and 15 July 1596. Cádiz served as a vital departure point for the Spanish fleet trading with the New World, and had previously been raided by Francis Drake in 1587. These actions made Philip II dispatch the Armada against England the following year, leading to its disastrous defeat due to storms and attacks by English forces under Charles Howard and Francis Drake. What is intriguing is Queen Elizabeth I's strategic use of privateering to undermine Spanish dominance in the Atlantic. Similarly, the Ottoman Empire employed Barbary corsairs as an extension of its navy to assault merchant ships and navies of Christian nations in Europe, including France, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Venice, and Malta from the late Middle Ages through to the Early Modern period. Many European states also granted privateering rights to merchant vessels in times of conflict, allowing them to seize enemy ships, free hostages for ransom, and levy a tax of 10–20% on the loot. During this period, pirates held a dual status as both illegal plunderers and sometimes commissioned naval officers. Among English pirates, figures like Francis Drake and Henry Morgan were knighted or appointed to official positions, gaining wealth and prestige. While Mediterranean piracy often conjures images of Muslim pirates depicted as barbaric and uncivilized, many European nations tacitly sanctioned piracy as a strategic response to their naval deficiencies. Cervantes critiqued the institutionalized and legalized violence prevalent in Europe and the Ottoman Empire alike. In *La española inglesa*, the story began with Clotaldo, a knight and English naval captain who led the sack of Cádiz, where he kidnapped Isabel, a seven-year-old Spanish girl, as a trophy. When Isabel's parents implored the commander of the English Navy for her return, offering all their possessions, he promptly ordered her release, pledging no clemency for her abductor, but Clotaldo defied this order and took the girl to England, raising her tenderly as his own daughter. She flourished into a young woman and eventually captured the heart of his son, Ricaredo. However, Queen Elizabeth I, having heard rumors about her, decided to employ Isabel as her servant. When Ricaredo confessed his love for Isabel to the Queen and sought permission to marry her, Queen Elizabeth I imposed a condition: Ricaredo must make a significant contribution to his country if he wishes to marry Isabel. In the novel, Queen Elizabeth I said:

> The two ships, [. . .], are about to leave to privateer, and I have made Baron Lansac their commander. I make you captain of one of them, because the line of you come from assures me that it will compensate for your youth. And be aware of the kindness I am doing you, for I am giving you the opportunity, corresponding to who you are, to show in the service of your queen the worth of your intelligence and your person. . . (Cervantes 2016, p. 145)

Thus, Ricaredo embarked on an unusual mission, serving both as a pirate and a naval officer. The primary targets of these two "privateering ships" were Portuguese and Spanish vessels returning from the New World. Sailing towards the Azores Islands, they encountered a Turkish pirate ship near the entrance to the Strait of Gibraltar. Engaging in battle, they achieved a significant victory. During this encounter, the English ships lowered their own flag and hoisted the Spanish flag, attempting to disguise their actions as those of Spain rather than England. However, the Turks quickly discerned their true identity as English corsair ships. Noteworthy scenes from this novel include the battle between English

and Turkish pirates at the entrance to the Mediterranean Sea from the Atlantic. Additionally, there is a moment when Ricaredo identifies the captured Turkish pirate ships as belonging to Arnaute Mami's fleet, who actually captured Cervantes in 1576 and took him to Algiers. When the Turkish pirates were defeated, the Spanish captives aboard their ship felt even greater apprehension upon realizing that their rescuers were not Spanish naval forces but English pirates. This highlighted the equal fear Spanish sailors had of both Turkish and English pirates during that era. Ricaredo, who sailed a ship laden with "spices, pearls, and diamonds worth a million gold coins" to London, received high praise from Queen Elizabeth and was granted permission to marry Isabel. Thus, Ricaredo became a true pirate and a nobleman at the same time. The social standing of his family appeared to have been elevated through this shift, as evidenced by Queen Elizabeth I's commendation. Cervantes questioned and unsettled the prevailing values of his time, exploring the distinctions between soldiers and thieves while addressing issues of social justice. However, Ricaredo's family concealed a significant secret—they were clandestine Catholics, leading him to avoid targeting Spain or Spanish vessels. During Queen Elizabeth I's reign, England faced significant religious turmoil following the Reformation. The Church of England, established by Henry VIII's separation from the Roman Catholic Church, was still finding its footing. Queen Mary I, who had reigned before Elizabeth, was known as "Bloody Mary" for her harsh persecution of Protestants in her attempt to restore Catholicism, influenced by her husband Philip II of Spain. Elizabeth I, however, continued her father's Protestant legacy, leading to heightened tensions with Catholic Spain, which viewed itself as the protector of the Catholic faith. This rivalry extended into the Atlantic, where England's piracy was a means of contesting Spain's dominance. To the Spaniards, England's pirates were akin to those of the Barbary corsairs in the Mediterranean. Cervantes's depiction of Spanish and English relations reveals that, by the late 16th and early 17th centuries, piracy was driven more by economic motivations and geopolitical competition than by religious or civilizational clashes. Pirates were primarily motivated by profit, transcending national and religious boundaries. Cervantes's narrative challenges prevailing stereotypes about piracy, highlighting its economic rather than religious or patriotic motivations. His portrayal reflects broader themes of Western imperialism, including the interplay between European expansion and religious fervor.

4. Conclusions

This paper delved into the themes of piracy and captivity represented in Cervantes's literary works, with a particular focus on their geographical settings. Mediterranean piracy was often perceived as barbaric, anti-civilizational, and inhumane, qualities frequently attributed to Muslims, while contrasting sharply with the perceived rationality and humanity of Europe or the Occident. However, Cervantes's captivity narratives meticulously unravel these prejudices and biases, shedding light on the process of "othering" and exposing the narcissistic and deceptive self-perceptions prevalent among Europeans of his time.

In his "Southern Mediterranean Setting" works, Cervantes vividly portrayed the suffering of the Christian captives inflicted by Barbary pirates and the Muslim rulers, who were the predominant marauders in the region. After his release from captivity, Cervantes aimed to raise public awareness about the ongoing plight of Christian captives in Algiers and to urge the Spanish government to take decisive action for their liberation. Therefore, in his literary works, Cervantes often drew a sharp distinction between Good and Evil, and Christianity and Islam, reflecting themes reminiscent of the Crusades. However, while this dichotomy was observed, his critique did not seek to condemn Islam as a whole. Instead, his focus was on critiquing institutional violence and intolerance against those regarded as *different* or *other*, while advocating for a vision of co-existence and mutual understanding. In his "Eastern Mediterranean Setting" works, Cervantes explored Orientalism from two perspectives. While the confrontational dynamic between Christianity and Islam, and Spain and the Moors, persisted in the "Southern Mediterranean Setting" works, Cervantes transcended these binary oppositions in the Eastern Mediterranean settings, particularly in

La gran sultana. In this play, Turkish figures, including the Sultan, were depicted in a comic and absurd manner. This portrayal mitigated fears of Turks and Islamophobia, introducing a carnivalesque humor that diminished the distance between opposing empires. Despite its fantastical and romantic elements, *La gran sultana* was significant for presenting an alternative perspective that highlighted the positive aspects of Islam as the *other*. In this sense, *La gran sultana* overcame the Islamophobia present in Cervantes's earlier works and substituted it with an Islamophilia, although elements favorable to Muslims are observed partially in his earlier works. In his "Trans-Mediterranean Setting" works, Cervantes undertook a subversive effort to challenge prevailing stereotypes of pirates. Traditionally, pirates were associated with ignorance, barbarism, and poverty, especially in relation to the Moors. However, Cervantes, in *La española inglesa*, questioned the distinction between privateering and piracy when both involved raiding civilians. He examined whether a society that glorified those who plundered in the name of national interest through acts of brutality could genuinely consider itself civilized. Piracy, far from being merely criminal acts by rogue groups, frequently functioned as state-sanctioned assaults against enemy nations. Notably, England's national support of pirates, under the guise of privateering, flourished until the late 17th century, drawing parallels with the Ottoman Empire's stance on piracy, which challenged the Western notion of "white mythology". Jacques Derrida critiqued this Eurocentrism as follows: "A white mythology which assembles and reflects Western culture: the white man takes his own mythology (that is, Indo-European mythology), his logos-that is, the mythos of his idiom, for the universal form of that which it is still his inescapable desire to call Reason" (Derrida 1982, p. 213). Derrida's concept of "white mythology" equates to Eurocentrism or Logocentrism, representing a worldview where the West historically viewed non-Western cultures as inherently inferior, barbaric, and lacking rationality. Consequently, European domination and colonial rule were justified as natural and beneficial for maintaining global order, contrasting with groups like the Barbary pirates who resisted such hegemony as malevolent. Yet, the concern with the Barbary pirates extended beyond their illegal and predatory actions of seizing property and freedoms, and trading captives as slaves. It encompassed the unsettling reversal of power dynamics, where non-Westerners exerted dominance over Westerners in a world otherwise governed by Western values and standards. Thus, the Barbary pirates could be seen as particularly problematic and perilous because they symbolized a challenge to, or rejection of, the legitimacy of the Western value system, belief system, and "white mythology".

Through his literary works, Cervantes adeptly achieved a dual purpose, especially in his captivity narratives. On the one hand, he vividly portrayed the brutality of the Barbary pirates and the suffering of captives in Algiers, illuminating the harsh realities faced by victims suddenly deprived of their freedoms by pirates. On the other hand, he implicitly challenged the Western value system that demonized non-Westerners while concealing or ignoring its own faults, mistakes, and hypocrisies, even as its assaults on civilians were justified as secondary war or privateering. Sometimes, piracy was glorified and romanticized by poets like Lord Byron and José de Espronceda. However, regardless of whether it was labeled as piracy or privateering, from the victim's point of view, both were essentially the same: acts of violence and raids against human freedom. His critique exposed prevalent stereotypes about pirates and Muslims, highlighting the inherent blind spots of Orientalism and "white mythology"—imperialistic discourses deeply ingrained in Western thought. As a result, Cervantes emerged as a pioneering writer who vehemently opposed all forms of oppression against human freedom, challenging the prejudices and ignorance prevalent in his era.

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Notes

[1] The pirates mistook him for a person of importance by letters of recommendation signed by Don Juan, the half-brother of King Philip II and commander-in-chief of his unit, and by the Viceroy of Naples, Duque de Sessa. They demanded five hundred gold escudos for his release (de Riquer 2005; Canavaggio 1990; McCrory 2002; Belloso Martín 2016). Cervantes was rescued on 19 September 1580.

[2] Algiers was the center of Mediterranean piracy at the time and one of the largest trading ports in the region, specializing in trading plunder. With a population of 150,000, it was larger than Rome, Palermo, and even Naples, and boasted the largest slave market in the Mediterranean. At the end of the 16th century, the number of Christian prisoners in Algiers was estimated to be more than 25,000 (de Sosa 2011; Canavaggio 2020). These prisoners were divided into two categories: "captives", who had a high ransom value and a better chance of being released, living in concentration camps called bagnios; and "slaves", who served their Muslim masters or rowed the oars of galleys. Additionally, the number of renegades—Christians who had converted to Islam after being captured—was estimated to be half of the total population. These individuals were not exclusively Berbers or Moors but were a diverse group including Turks, Greeks, Italians, Spaniards, French, Dutch, and British. Antonio de Sosa, a Portuguese priest who was imprisoned with Cervantes, wrote the first history book on Algiers, *La Topografía e historia general de Argel* (1612). In this work, he left several records of Cervantes's time in Algiers.

[3] This comedy, one of Cervantes's early works, is presumed to have been created between 1581 and 1583. In this paper, the date of 1583 is used, as there are records of its performance from that year. Cervantes referred to the work as *Los tratos de Argel* in an addition to *El viage de Parnaso*, but the extant manuscript titles it *El trato de Argel*. As a result, the two titles are often used arbitraly in various books. However, this paper will refer to it as *Los tratos de Argel*, as indicated Cervantes.

[4] The English titles of each work were derived from The Oxford Handbook of Cervantes, listed as follows: Life in Algiers, Eight Comedies and Eight New Interludes Never Performed; The Gallant Spaniard; The Bagnios of Algiers and The Grand Sultana Doña Catalina de Oviedo; The Generous Lover; The Spanish English Woman; and The Travails of Persiles and Sigismunda, a Northern Tale.

[5] In the 16th century, Barbary pirates held a dual status while serving the Ottoman Empire. They autonomously engaged in pirate activities to satisfy their own needs, and simultaneously waged war on behalf of the Islamic monarch. While these two activities are conceptually distinct, they cleverly justified their piracy as part of *jihad*, framing it as a guerrilla war against Christianity (Konstam 1999).

[6] In 1492, the Catholic Monarchs of Spain issued the Alhambra Decree, mandating the expulsion of Jews who did not convert to Christianity. Over 300,000 Jews were driven out nearly penniless and fled to North Africa, the Middle East, the Netherlands, and Southeastern Europe. Some of these exiles became pirates, seeking revenge against Spain. A notable example is the Barbary pirate captain Sinan Reis, who achieved a significant victory over the Christian coalition led by Charles V in the Battle of Preveza in 1538, thereby solidifying the Ottoman Empire's supremacy in the Mediterranean.

[7] Even in 1578, two frigates carrying the Spanish viceroy of Sicily Duque de Terranova, who was returning home from his term of office, were captured by Barbary pirates led by Murat Rais and released after paying a ransom (Konstam 1999; Sola and de la Peña [1995] 1996).

[8] The first Spanish literary work to address the theme of captivity by pirates is believed to be Comedia Armelina, a Byzantine novel written by Lope de Rueda around 1545.

[9] The Mediterranean Sea consists of 15 marginal seas, including the Adriatic Sea, the Aegean Sea, and the Ionian Sea. Fernand Braudel further subdivided the Mediterranean Sea into distinct regions: "To the east, the Black Sea, only partly Mediterranean; the Aegean or Archipelago Sea; in the center the Adriatic and the seas between Africa and Sicily which do not have a particular name; to the west the Tyrrheanian Sea, the true Sea of Italy, the "Etruscan" sea between Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica and the west coast of Italy; and in the far west, between southern Spain and North Africa, another sea without name, the "Mediterranean Channel', which could have as its eastern boundary a line running from Cape Matifou near Algiers to Cape de la Nao, Valencia, and which joins the Atlantic at the Straits of Gibraltar" (Braudel 1995a).

[10] This execution occurred on 18 May 1577, shortly after an incident in which an Algiers pirate named Alicax was captured in Valencia, brought before the Inquisition, and subsequently burned at the stake. In retaliation for Alicax's execution, his relatives targeted Friar Miguel de Aranda, a native of Valencia and a knight of the Military Order of Montesa and publicly executed him and burned his body. Antonio de Sosa and Cervantes, who were close friends of Miguel de Aranda at the time, witnessed his execution. Cervantes recounted this incident in his work Los tratos de Argel through conversations between Christian slaves Sebastián and Saavedra, while Antonio de Sosa provided a detailed description of the event in Chapter 3 of Topografía.

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