

Stony Brook University



OFFICIAL COPY

The official electronic file of this thesis or dissertation is maintained by the University Libraries on behalf of The Graduate School at Stony Brook University.

© All Rights Reserved by Author.

**Displacement and the Negotiation of an American
Identity in African Muslim Slave Narratives**

A Dissertation Presented

by

Safet Dabovic

to

The Graduate School
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

Stony Brook University

August 2009

Copyright by
Safet Dabovic
2009

Stony Brook University

The Graduate School

Safet Dabovic

We, the dissertation committee for the above candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy degree, hereby recommend acceptance of this dissertation.

Susan Scheckel — Dissertation Advisor
Associative Professor of English

Heidi Hutner — Chairperson of Defense
Associative Professor of English

Andrew Newman
Assistant Professor of English

E. Anthony Hurley
Associative Professor of Africana Studies at Stony Brook University

This dissertation is accepted by the Graduate School

Lawrence Martin
Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract of the Dissertation

**Displacement and the Negotiation of an American
Identity in African Muslim Slave Narratives**

by

Safet Dabovic

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

Stony Brook University

2009

African Muslim slave narratives are the earliest forms of Islamic writing in the United States. Figures like Ayuba Suleiman Diallo, Ibrahima Abd ar-Rahman, Omar ibn Said, Bilali Mohammed, Salih Bilali, Lamena Kebe, Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua and Nicholas Said endured the horrors of the Middle Passage and came to the Americas as literate products of a proud West African educational system. They negotiated the complex political, social and racial terrain of the Americas by producing slave narratives, sometimes in English and other times in Arabic, in order to inscribe their active negotiations of western modernity. Although their narratives contain the conventions typically found in traditional slave narratives, there are marked differences in form and content that move away from the basic formula of the double quest for literacy and freedom and require us to use alternative theoretical frameworks.

I deploy the notion of displacement as a way to read these African Muslim slave narratives. Simply put, displacement involves the sense of forced relocation that diasporic figures experience and their subsequent creative adaptations, inventive expressions, and hybridizations of dominant discourses. I rely on works by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Stuart Hall, Angelica Bammer, Edouard Glissant and Homi Bhabha to argue that, in order to respond to the transformations caused by their displacement, African Muslim narrators produced complicated expressive texts that problematize national and religious boundaries, requiring us to expand the traditional methodologies of reading slave narratives.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Displacement: Rhizomes, Opacity and Hybridity	4
Chapters	11
Chapter 1: Early Symbols of Arabic Displacement	16
Mimicry, Ambivalence and the Opacity of the Other	18
Thomas Bluett and the Negotiation of Mimicry	22
Philosophical Quandary	35
Ibrahima Abd ar-Rahman: Performing Moorishness	38
The Question of Antebellum Literacy	44
Cyrus Griffin: Constructing the Moor	49
Ar-Rahman Travels North: Transformation, New Forms and Content	55
Southern Backlash: The Dangers of Arabic Literacy and the Sword of Islam	61
Conclusion	64
Chapter 2: Linguistic Displacement: Ethno-Philological Examinations of the Slave Narratives by Salih Bilali and Lamena Kebe	66
Salih Bilali’s Narrative and the Question of the Face	69
Lamena Kebe: Ethnological Transcriptions of the Jakhanke	85
Kebe: Making Dwight into a Seeker of Knowledge	93
Chapter 3: African Muslim Opacity: Exploring the Unintelligible in the Narratives of Omar ibn Said and Bilali Mohammed	104
Omar ibn Said: Opaque Detours	108
<i>The Diary of Ben Ali</i> : Opacity, Refrains and Territory	125
Chapter 4: The Displacement of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua	144
Background, Assemblages and Authenticity	145
Creating the Heroic Fugitive	148
Native of Djougou	150
African Journeys and Disruptions	155
Brazilian Slavery: Transformation, Transference and Trauma	162
The Spectacle of Haiti: Degeneration, Regeneration and Ambivalence	171
American Camouflage: the Unhomed Illusion	175
Intermezzo: Crossing Boundaries, Borders and Nations	181
Chapter 5: Transnational Trajectories and Displacement: Examining Transnational Pathways in the <i>Autobiography of Nicholas Said</i>	184
Displaced Gentility: Shedding Light, Opening Doors	186
Undoing Stereotypes: Intervening in Privileged Western Discourses	189
Tripoli: Intervention, Destabilization and Displacement	198
Mecca/Smyrna/Istanbul	204
A Valet Crossing Europe	212
Enter the Caribbean: Reconnecting with African Identity	218
Entering the American South: Educator, Lecturer, and Traveler	221
Conclusion: Summation of African Muslim Contributions	228
Works Cited	231

Introduction

In *Kentuckian in New York* (1834), southern writer William Caruthers introduces Americans to African Muslim writing. Protagonist Beverley Randolph stops at the plantation of a friend and encounters unique slaves living in the slave-quarters. Randolph seemingly enters a complicated transcultural contact zone and discovers that “many of these negroes . . . were born in Africa.” In an unusual moment, Randolph asks whether any of these individuals could write. He then recounts the following scene that in many ways stands as a tropic framework to explain many American encounters with literate African Muslims:

They replied that there was one man in the quarter who could write in his own language, and several of them went out and brought in a tall, bald-headed old fellow, who seemed to come with great reluctance. After being told what was desired, he acknowledged to me that he could write when he last tried, which was many years previous. I took out my pocket-book, tore out a blank leaf, and handing him a pen from my pocket inkstand, requested him to give me a specimen. He took the head of the barrel on his lap, and began, if I recollect right, on the right side of the page; the following is a fac simile of his performance . . . (146)

Caruthers provides a translation of old Charno’s writing, which turns out to be a copy of the *Al-Fatiha* or first Surah of the Qur’an:

In the name of God the merciful! the compassionate! God bless our Lord Mohammed his prophet, and his descendants, and his followers, and prosper them exceedingly. Praise be to God the Lord of all creatures! The

merciful, the compassionate king of the day of judgment! Thee we adore, and of thee we implore assistance! Guide us in the right way, the way of those with whom thou art well pleased, and not of those with whom thou art angry, nor of those who are in error. Amen! (147)

Caruthers explains that “The original is written in Arabic. The old fellow’s name is Charno, which it seems he has retained, after being enslaved, contrary to their general custom in that respect. I became quite affected and melancholy in talking to this venerable old man, and you may judge from that rare circumstance that he is no common character” (147). As Caruthers points out the “uncommon” character of this slave, he also describes a moment of transculturation where a member of a subordinated group depicts an aspect of their culture, in this case Arabic literacy from West Africa, and produces an inventive intervention into the hegemonic discourses transmitted by dominant culture that results in a new expression of interaction and exchange.

Caruthers’s novel shows that African Muslims were a unique caste-like minority, a minority within a minority, who used language and literacy to mark their identities and gain some type of notoriety. Although we cannot affirm whether “Charno” actually existed, we do know that Caruthers was interested in various African Muslims who lived near his plantation in Georgia. Historical evidence suggests that some African Muslims lived in the region. Allan D. Austin suggests that 29,695 African Muslims were shipped to United States during the antebellum period. Richard Brent Turner posits that as many as 14% of Africans shipped to the United States during the years before the Civil War might have been Muslim. Michael Gomez concludes, “it is therefore reasonable to conclude that Muslims may have come to America by the thousands, if not tens of

thousands. A more precise assessment is difficult to achieve” (*Exchanging* 66).

Nevertheless, we do know that Muslims reached these shores and attempted to negotiate their sense of self sometimes in ways that confounded the local slave system and sought to address their sense of displacement. Angelica Bammer reminds us that displaced subjects inscribe a heterogeneous and changing concept of identity that registers a “vital double move between marking and recording the absence and lost and inscribing presence” (xiv). Charno’s presence and writing sample foregrounds the ambitions of this project: to explore how African Muslims struggled with their displacement, produced inventive slave narratives to negotiate the tension between belonging and non-belonging, and ultimately used these writings to perform hybrid and opaque identities that were difficult, fragmentary, and resistant to fixed unitary positionality.

Between 1734 and 1870, eight African Muslims, Ayuba Suleiman Diallo, Ibrahima Abd ar-Rahman, Lamena Kebe, Salih Bilali, Bilali Mohammed, Umar ibn Said, Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua and Nicholas Said, managed to gain some notoriety and for various reasons chronicled their self-conscious inscription of their displacement into textual form. These narratives illustrate an alternative negotiation of modernity and reveal displaced subjects who were not absorbed within the traditional boundaries of the nation-state and the cultural matrix of the Christian African American community. Yvonne Haddad suggests that “the American experience forges as well as forces a New Muslim identity that is born out of both the quest to belong and the experience of being permanently depicted as ‘the other’” (29). This project argues that African Muslim writers problematize the notion of national belonging and interfere with traditional western narratives of difference. In many ways, they appropriate the language of the

slave narrative and negotiate their displacement by producing texts that are rhizomatic, opaque and hybrid. African Muslims do not write to enter the teleology of western thought, but to document themselves as marginalized figures, neither here nor there, forming inventive expressions and transformations that disrupt the oppositional frameworks of difference that establish both nations and cultures.

Displacement: Rhizomes, Opacity and Hybridity

I attempt to locate alternative bodies of knowledge and subject positions for African Muslim slave narrators because their works confound traditional ways of reading slave narratives. Initially, scholars like Philip Curtin, Terry Alford, Douglas Grant, Austin Allan, and Henry Louis Gates Jr., showed in various ways that African Muslim slave narratives are a complex and rich form of the slave narrative genre. For the most part, these researchers have categorized and included these Arabic texts within the black literary tradition. For instance, in *The Slave's Narrative* (1985), Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Charles Davies used an anonymous review of Thomas Bluett's *Some Memoirs of the Life of Job Ben Solomon* (1734) as a starting point in the study of African American slave narratives, claiming that this narrative represents one of the first instances of a black African trying to "write himself into being." In *(Dis)Forming the American Canon* (1993), Ronald A.T. Judy problematizes the inclusion of Ayuba Suleiman Diallo's narrative and other African Muslim narratives within the African American literary canon. Specifically, Judy argues that the *Diary of Ben Ali* challenges canonization by being "a text whose polyvalence refuses to be comprehended by western literary criticism's unadulterated paradigms" (227). In many ways, Judy argues that the text is an

enigma that resists understanding and challenges the traditional framework of the black literary tradition. While Judy makes the point that African Muslim narratives are an “emerging literature,” his claim that these texts are unknowable is problematic because he privileges a position of incommensurability that is tantamount to the unknowable other. This notion of indeterminacy suggests that African Muslim texts can undermine the state or academy, resist being known or understood, and ultimately make impossible the thinking across groups. While complete understanding of the other is problematic—as Homi Bhabha writes “There is always going to be this moment of incommensurability”—developing a basic language of understanding between the other and the dominant is still possible. My contribution to this body of research is to turn to the intersection of post-structuralist and postcolonial theory, specifically to the work by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Stuart Hall, Angelica Bammer, Edouard Glissant and Homi Bhabha in order to advance the question of displacement as a more productive way of engaging these texts.

This project focuses on a body of African Muslim slave narratives that raise questions of cultural difference and belonging and in the process presents complicated negotiations and experiences of displacement. In *Displacements* (1992), Angelika Bammer defines the theoretical notion of displacement as “the separation of people from their native culture either through physical dislocation (as refugees, immigrants, migrants, exiles, or expatriates) or the colonizing imposition of a foreign culture” (xi). Simply put, displacement involves the sense of forced relocation that diasporic figures experience and their subsequent creative adaptations, inventive expressions, and hybridizations of dominant discourses. In this manner, displacement brings into

consideration aspects of the black Afro-American diasporic tradition, the sense of experimentation and hybridity with dominant western culture with which African Muslim had to contend. These narratives are a product of an ongoing process of transgression where African Muslims not only inscribe the sense of loss and the inscription of new presence, but also present a body of work that considers the problems of constructing new identities and forms of communication and frameworks of understanding within the nation-state. In other words, these displaced African Muslims take an active role in carving out their lives within the complicated and diverse social formations of the black diaspora, using their narratives in order to cope with new contingencies and asserting a crucial engagement with the racial discursive terrain within the United States. Their negotiations of displacement allow us to engage with the problem of difference and to develop the necessary framework to bridge basic problems of subjectification and language in order to recognize that African Muslims transformed the landscape of national belonging into a hybrid ethno-landscape of transnational becoming.

While displacement offers an intriguing theoretical framework to read African Muslim slave narratives, providing a critical route of inquiry to explore how they employed unique counter-discourses to navigate the tensions, contradictions, and reconfigurations of enslavement in the Americas, it also enables us to imagine that different minority groups have different relationships to the hegemonic power group. This is an especially important point when read against the backdrop of current black diasporic theory. In *The Black Atlantic* (1992), Paul Gilroy shows that the African diaspora and the Black Atlantic represent a counterculture of modernity, where black subjects appropriate components of western theoretical discourses, technologies and

languages and then create an alternative modernity based on their own experiences and interactions. Unfortunately, following this groundbreaking study, “universal” frameworks tended to appear in diaspora discourses that assume that all black minority groups made similar subversive maneuvers against existing power structures. This project resists such generalizations and addresses the “local” struggles, specifically focusing on the ways certain Muslims used a West African milieu and texture, comprised of their cosmopolitan backgrounds, literacy in Arabic and ability to access and navigate transnational circuits, to subvert the narratives of colonial power and dominant cultures and seek actively to negotiate questions of belonging and self-representation as they enter intersubjective spaces that challenge generic conventions.

African Muslim narratives are often rhizomatic works noted for their interconnections and depictions of diasporic life. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), Deleuze and Guattari explain that the rhizome is a way to explore multiplicities in thinking and writing. Rhizomes enable us to move away from binary thinking, which often is “arboreal” and establishes molar and linear frameworks of engagement with the world. Rhizomatic thinking and writing involves making continuous and ongoing connections: “Any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be... rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, social sciences, and social struggles (7). “Mapping” these connections can involve following something that Deleuze and Guattari consider as “lines of flight.” They write that “there are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines” (9). African Muslim narratives do not generate standard tropes located in conventional slave

narratives and instead read like “maps” that reproduce various geographical regions, local epistemologies and non-traditional identities. In this regard, many instances of transculturation appear in these works—making the narratives about establishing new orders of meanings and demarking new boundaries of the Islamic *um 'ma* or community. In the process of establishing these connections, they construct provisional and contingent identities that are opaque and resistant to categorization.

Edouard Glissant argues that multiple networks of resistance based on rhizomatic concepts, or what he considers as “relations,” are needed to develop opaque structures that challenge the linearity of western thinking and representation. Glissant suggests that opacity means that “which is not obscure, though it is possible to be so and accepted as such. It is that which cannot be reduced, which is the perennial guarantee of participation and confluence” (*PR* 191). Opacity does not suggest a deficiency or lack; instead, Glissant stresses that “opacity . . . is not enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy but subsistence within an irreducible singularity” (*PR* 190). In a sense, Glissant is talking about cross-cultural relationships and connections that reject western tendencies to homogenize cultures—which are acts of western violence. Glissant explains further that “In the world of cross-cultural relationships, which takes over from the homogeneity of a single culture, to accept the opaqueness—that is the irreducible density of the other—is to truly accomplish, through diversity, a human objective” (*Caribbean Discourse* 133). Opacity is an act of freedom from arborescent thought, which often requires a subject to accept certain epistemological terrains, methodologies and technologies. Glissant suggests:

The thought of opacity distracts me from absolute truths whose guardian I might believe to be myself. Far from cornering me with futility and inactivity, by making me sensitive to the limits of every method, it relativizes every possibility of action within me. Whether this consists of spreading overarching general ideas or hanging on to the concrete, the laws of facts, the precision of details, or sacrificing some apparently less important thing in the name of efficacy, the thought of opacity saves me from unequivocal courses and irreversible choices. (192)

In terms of western categorization and understanding of the other, Glissant suggests that such characteristics lead to a series of opaque contradictions. Homi Bhabha, writing in a slightly different, but equally relevant context, develops this notion further by stating that postcolonial or migrant writers “are positioned in a range of contradictory positions that co-exist” that challenge the very logic of selfhood. Such subject positions ultimately “change the very terms of our recognition of the ‘person’” (5). In other words, opacity fosters a counter-discourse that challenges dominant western modes of thinking and categorization and privileges a position of impenetrability.

In this light, African Muslims narratives produce opaque types of subjectivities that manage to both conceal meaning while simultaneously revealing new types of meaning that challenge western representation. There appears a cunning, fluid and at times secretive language that yields a complicated strategy of resistance. In some instances, these narratives are not completely intelligible or transparent with some African Muslims using their literacy as a form of “open” concealment that enabled them to construct complex subject positions behind sometimes illegible Arabic script. Their

narratives appropriate, combine, and manipulate western genres that inscribe an Islamic outlook, and produce innovative counter discourses that destabilize the structures, codes and language of domination. This project shows that western encounters with African Muslims are bound in the attempt to objectify and assimilate, which reveal the complicated terrain that mark the limits of Enlightenment rationality and show that the representational frameworks used by eighteenth and nineteenth century editors, ethnologists, and commentators to categorize African Muslims are porous. For this reason, westerners often attached various ethnic names or concepts to these writers, such as Moors, Noble Savages, “privileged informants,” and Arabs. There is a type of density that protects African Muslim subjects from the scopic vision of western modernity, allowing them to occupy interesting social spaces from where they produce innovative types of resistance strategies. It is important to recognize that the notion of opacity, complete with its contradictions and ambiguities, provides a spatial politics of inclusion rather than exclusion that helps to commence innovative expressions of identity and produces inventive sites of collaboration and contestation.

In this manner, the various inventive expressions and hybridizations across diasporic spaces becomes an important component of these narratives, showing subjects in active negotiation with their environment. In short, hybridity usually refers to the “the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization” (Ashcroft 118). The African Muslims in this project recognize that once they have been removed from Africa, they cannot remain unchanged in their new cultural environment. Often, some conventions of the slave narrative genre appear in their work; however, these conventions also work alongside and together with native deployments of disruption,

deferrals, acts of sly civility, innovative deployments of Qur'anic refrains, and inventive uses of camouflage to challenge imperial discourses. Their appropriation of western forms and entry into new types of hybrid discourses, to borrow from Homi Bhabha, deprive the “imposed imperialist culture, not only of the authority that it has for so long imposed politically, often through violence, but even of its own claims to authenticity” (57). The “displaced space” becomes a place of transformation where “change lies in the re-articulation, or translation of elements that are neither the One . . . nor the Other . . . but something else besides which contests the terms and territories of both” (Bhabha 28). In this way, their texts investigate the legitimacy of western racial discourses and in the process evade the reproduction of traditional western binary categories as they develop hybrid expressions of cultural exchange and growth. In the following chapters, African Muslims engage in the struggle for identity, belonging and home while they subvert the dominance of established orders.

Chapters

Chapter 1 examines the deployment of Arabic and mimicry as a diversionary provenance in *Some Memoirs of Job Ben Solomon* (1734), “The Unfortunate Moor” (1828), “New Haven” (1828) and “The Unfortunate Moorish Prince” (1828) to broaden our understanding of traditional black diasporic identities. Innovative deployments of Arabic literacy in these texts allow Ayuba and ar-Rahman, through the manipulation of subtle forms of mimicry and inversion, to subvert idealistic images of Noble Savagery. The presence of Arabic in *Some Memoirs of Job Ben Solomon* forces editor Thomas Bluett to “insign” an unstable stereotypical identity—the Noble Savage—upon Ayuba in

order to make him a fixed object of knowledge; this identity allows Ayuba to craft an identity based on a model that is inherently unstable and to enter early American and British social spaces that lead to his manumission. The narratives by Ibrahima Abd ar-Rahman document his entry into fluid social and political spaces that resist easy classification. Ar-Rahman convinces his editors, Thomas Marschalk, Cyrus Griffin, and Thomas Gallaudet, that he is not a “negro,” but a “Moor.” Much like Ayuba, ar-Rahman manipulates this imprecise model of Moorishness in order to manipulate his benefactors, gain manumission and leave the United States. Consequently, the narratives by Ayuba Suleiman Diallo and Ibrahima Abd ar-Rahman document the way they enter the dominant regime of representation, mimic traditional western representations of West Africa, and deploy Arabic in an inventive manner that leads to their eventual freedom.

Chapter 2 considers the narratives of Lamena Kebe and Salih Bilali in relation to American ethnological discourses of the nineteenth century. American ethnologists, William Brown Hodgson and Theodore Dwight, Jr., attempted to use Salih and Kebe as “native informants” to construct an accurate picture of the ethnography, cartography and philology of West Africa. I show that these narratives describe the inability of westerners to understand Africa without the benefit of direct experience and expose the basic assumptions of western superiority that seem to drive western discourses on Africa. In Salih Bilali’s problematic and monological narrative, Thomas Couper, Salih’s owner, answers William Hodgson Brown’s call to locate a real-life example of the “Hausa” depicted in Dr. James Cowles Prichard’s *Natural History of Man* (1843). In the process, he ends up confronting the notion of Deleuzian faciality as he attempts to translate a black/white picture and then to fix a stable orthographical system of representation that accounts for both the picture and Salih. In the mistranslation and heterography, the narrative

reveals the unstable nature of relying upon “native informants” in order to create a homogenous image of the continent. This narrative anticipates the issue of displacement, deferments and opacity present in the narrative by Kebe, who was a Sereculeh from West Africa. This narrative was produced under the auspices of the American Ethnological Society, this time with Theodore Dwight, Jr. researching the matter of African Muslim ethnophilology. Dwight attempts to transcribe a fixed etymology of West African phrases using Kebe as a knowledgeable source. However, Kebe deploys a form of sly civility, using “doubling” and Sufism, in an attempt to depict an accurate experience of Jakhanken pedagogy and in the process challenge the epistemological foundations of American ethnology. I suggest that this encounter is significant because it illustrates how the challenge of rendering African Muslim subjectivity created problems of translation and categorization while challenging imperialist discourse.

Chapter 3 considers the various tools of opacity—detours, deferments and Deleuzian “refrains”—that appear in the narratives by Bilali Muhammad and Omar ibn Said. In these narratives, the United States is not a “place,” but an on-going project of identity formation. Bilali and Omar create a complicated type of narrative presents various African and American words, and Islamic concepts and expressions. They fashion an innovative language that offers new frames of analysis that resist and transcend national boundaries, expands the traditional methodologies of reading slave narratives, and shows the articulations of Islamic practice in a cultural and geographical space that has not been historically considered. In *The Life of Omar bin Said* (1831), Omar responds to the American Colonization Society’s desire to produce a text that depicts an alternative image of slavery and constructs a fragmentary biography that loops, detours to and around key Qur’anic refrains that not only resist the practices of domination and subordination located in traditional slave discourses, but also marks his sense of belonging and alienation in the American south. In *The Diary of Ben Ali*

(1857), Bilali Muhammad independently produces a journal of Islamic practices and rituals and writes using a hybrid form of Arabic and Fulani. By relying upon fragmentary pieces of Islamic prayers, we can read a temporal Islamic zone, as if anticipating a future Islamic consciousness, that marks an expressive space defined by the sound of a familiar language in a foreign territory. However, these are not necessarily complete prayers. Deleuze reminds us that we often will repeat a refrain when we want to bring a sense of home with us. If this is accurate, the narrative is a series of refrains that stake a claim in a landscape that had been traditionally hostile to Islam.

Chapter 4 examines the context in which Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua negotiates the displacements and deferrals that racial slavery and colonialism impose upon him in *The Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua* (1854). Locating the setting at various ports throughout the Americas, Baquaqua traverses cultures—African, Islamic, Brazilian, and American—and assumes temporary identities and affinities. There is a sense of constant transformation as Baquaqua lives a life of transnational experimentation. I document his travels across the Americas, and the dissolution of various identities that occur as he reconfigures and reorganizes, entering many types of public discourses, such as becoming an abolitionist and training to become an African missionary. Baquaqua presents a dynamic, reciprocal, transitory and multi-dimensional narrative creation in shaping a world of relations, disjunctures and transitions. This narrative is not about recounting his memories and travels—instead, it is an affirmation of the possibility for life and seeking new trajectories and becomings that may or may not recover ontological origins. Baquaqua travels upon transcultural and transnational trajectories reliant upon complex processes of hybridity and continuous adaptation to new milieus, events and encounters.

Chapter 5 argues that Nicholas Said expresses discursively a shifting spatial and geographical trajectory that enables him to manipulate the regimes of genteel travel writing

in *The Autobiography of Nicholas Said: A Native of Bornou, Eastern Soudan, Central Africa* (1873). Written after the abolishment of slavery in the United States, the narrative chronicles a life of travel and observation that complicates traditional conceptions of the way black travel writers imagined themselves. *The Autobiography* presents a type of transnational mobility that does not focus on the white traveler, but considers the displacement of the black mobile subject who leaves the Empire of Bornu-Kanem, enters the fluid Ottoman slave world, travels to Russia and then negotiates a complicated entry into western modernity. He learns to become a master of manipulating stereotypes and intervening into normative nineteenth century discourses that produced hegemonic frameworks of difference and “othering.” His mobility and rhetorical strategy enables him to enter complex types of public discourse where writing becomes an act of invention and self-creation that allows him to challenge western notions of African inferiority. Ultimately, through experience gained as a mobile subject, Said assumes the persona of a self-made public intellectual and reformer who appropriates and refigures the conventions of the travel narrative as he constructs an innovative narrative that straddles the line between travelogue and slave narrative.

The dissertation concludes by reflecting how and why African Muslim slave narratives expand the scope and appreciation of African Muslim contributions to the formation of American identities. African Muslim narratives present a different sort of literacy in the African diaspora that moves beyond the classic African American slave narrative’s focus on language-use and presence and offers new expressions of black subjectivity, religious pluralism and discursive innovation.

Chapter 1: Early Symbols of Arabic Displacement

The famous portraits by William Hoare and Henry Inman, which hang in the Library of the Congress and at the University of Massachusetts, provide important clues suggesting how to read the slaves narratives by Ayuba Suleiman Diallo and Ibrahima Abd ar-Rahman. In the first portrait, completed in 1734, Hoare depicts Ayuba Suleiman Diallo wearing traditional accoutrements from Bondou: silk white robes, a white turban and a small Qur'anic amulet hanging around his neck.¹ In the second portrait, Inman presents Ibrahima Abd ar-Rahman dressed in the style of a nineteenth century gentleman: white hair pushed back in the typical style of the day; his white collar pushed high, covering his neck and lower ear with a heavy overcoat's collar pushed under the collar; and his expression determined and certain. Toward the bottom of the portrait is a facsimile of Arabic writing. Hoare and Inman depict to their audiences African exceptions that did not easily refer to traditional signs of colonial control, knowledge and power. They attempt to translate the unknown into something familiar that mimics the idealistic expectations and desires of the western audience. However, the role that literacy plays in these portraits makes the subjects into enigmas who do not become adequate copies of these idealistic desires; instead it inverts the established order of western identities and forces westerners to confront the opacity of the "other."

Between 1734 and 1828, African Muslims reached the shores of the United States. There are many reasons for this movement. West Africa was in a state of upheaval. The pressures of the transatlantic slave trade and the various jihads left the

¹ There are many western accounts that note the practice in West Africa where a literate cleric or Imam would write out transcriptions from the Quran for various reasons. Typically, Muslims wore such amulets for protection against evil.

region in a state of destabilization. Two African Muslims, Ayuba Suleiman Diallo and Ibrahima ar-Rahman, fell victim to this instability. Typically, they would have crossed the Atlantic and been absorbed into the general scheme of American slavery. However, their literacy and ability to market themselves as non-blacks enabled them to escape this historical obliteration. Although their stories are atypical and indicative of exceptional tactics of resistance that many other slaves could not practice, they reveal much about the way race was constructed during this turbulent period and present us with alternative strategies of accommodation and adaption.

I establish that literacy in Arabic enables African Muslims the opportunity to mimic unconventional western identities and tropes. Traditionally, western ethnologists, explorers, and commentators have noted that Arabic in West Africa has been a marker of opacity, displacement and complex forms of trans-African hybridity. In the process, West African Muslims challenged established racial constructs of the period and confounded their editors who, faced with a potential paradigm shift in the way the west constructed African identity, turned to the active warehouse of cultural images and symbols of the western literary tradition to categorize them, naming them Noble Savages or Moors. We are reminded of a curious phrase that Deleuze and Guattari write: “people are missing” (*Kafka* 216). The narratives show that the person is clearly vacant and we must confront the aftermath of inscriptive violence: the stereotype, the order-word, and the mimic.

This chapter contends that *Some Memoirs of the Life of Job* (1734), by Thomas Bluett, and the short narratives, “The Unfortunate Moor” (1828) by Cyrus Griffin, an unnamed narrative by Abd ar-Rahman (1828) and “Abduhl Rahahman, The Unfortunate Moorish Prince” (1828) by Ralph R. Gurley, document the awkward negotiations that

some American editors experienced in the transcultural space between West Africa and America. The narratives reveal sources of unstable identity formations for early American observers that create ambivalence, producing both excess and displacement. Arabic plays an important role as a marker of cultural preservation where through a process of transformation and synthesis, Ayuba and ar-Rahman mark their “preslavery cultural self” and then manufacture an identity of necessity complete with holes and gaps that others can fill for them. They manipulate the uncertain parameters of colonial discourse and force their benefactors to entertain contradictory terms and modes of critical inquiry to account for their displacement. Consequently, appropriating the strategy of mimicry, Ayuba and ar-Rahman conform to idealistic and fanciful tropes circulating in the western cultural imagination and produce identities that mimic a partial vision of the colonizer’s imagination, “repeating” and destabilizing the original Noble Savage model.

Mimicry, Ambivalence and the Opacity of the Other

When reading the transnational slave narratives of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, researchers argue that five black authors are paramount examples of the genre: James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, John Marrant, Ottobah Cugoano, Olaudah Equiano, and John Jea. According to William L. Andrews, their works reveal “the bedrock experience and commonalities on which many Black Atlantic literary traditions rest” (*Pioneers* vii). These authors enable us to reconfigure the traditional “triangle trade” and to overlay an African perspective called the Black Atlantic. Such a shift places African identities in a new paradigm. As Paul Gilroy explains in *The Black*

Atlantic, this vast geographical region represents “one, single, complex unit of analysis” for “an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective” (31). Instead of imagining the Atlantic, especially the Middle Passage, as a site of cultural obliteration, the Black Atlantic becomes a location for new identity production. Gilroy claims:

The specificity of the modern political and cultural formation I want to call the Black Atlantic can be defined, on one level, through [a] desire to transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity. These desires are relevant to understanding political organizing and cultural criticism. They have always sat uneasily alongside the strategic choices forced on black movements and individuals embedded in national and political cultures and nation-states in America, the Caribbean, and Europe. (19)

In *Pioneers of the Black Atlantic*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and William L. Andrews situate the body of traditional transatlantic slave narratives within this innovative framework in order to lay down the foundations of a grander African American literary tradition. Specifically, they consider Olaudah Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789) as the representational text that shaped the Black Atlantic literary tradition. Consequently, it established the basic tropes, metaphors and discursive strategies that would make the “generic” narrative of Frederick Douglass possible in the nineteenth century. According to Gates:

Equiano’s Narrative was so richly structured that it became the prototype of the nineteenth-century slave narrative, best exemplified in the works of

Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, and Harriet Jacobs. It was Equiano whose texts served to create a model that ex-slaves would imitate. From his subtitle, “Written by Himself” and a signed engraving of the Black author holding an open text (the Bible) in his lap, to more subtle rhetorical strategies such as the overlapping of the slave’s arduous journey from orality to literacy, Equiano’s strategies of self-preservation and rhetorical representation heavily informed, if not determined, the shape of Black narratives before 1865. (*Signifying Monkey* 152-53)

A major problem is that such a reading privileges a specific type of tradition based on creating, to borrow a phrase from Aimé Ellis, “homogenous ideological representations of the African in the West” (10). Gates’ argument privileges a select body of African American writers as bearers of a black collective consciousness that foregrounds the future trajectories of African American thought. In short, according to Gates, the individual stories of African American slave narrators attempt to contain the collective consciousness of a race. Apparently, this type of canon building depicts a specific type of literary experience and privileges only certain types of voices and ideologies “in order to sustain the class interests of a specific body of critics of Black literature” (Ellis 11).

I do not intend to “deconstruct” black transatlantic literary tradition; instead, I want use a different range of theoretical tools in order to read an alternative type of slave narrative that constructs non-traditional identities not discussed in context to traditional discourses of the Black Atlantic. Although African Muslim writers Ayuba Suleiman Diallo, and Ibrahima Abd ar-Rahman (working independently and separated by eighty years) produced work to document their resistance to slavery and to assert their basic

humanity, they do so in such a way as to diverge from traditional transatlantic work. In particular, this chapter suggests that we can read strategies of mimicry and subversion in their texts and gain a more expansive image of Black Atlantic identity formation.

Typically, western discourses during the 18th and 19th century about African Muslims relied upon some form of the concept of mimicry. Often, stories written by western explorers, missionaries and venture capitalists attempted to claim that Fulanis and some Mande were European-like bearers of civilization. Sometimes, as seen in the works by Richard Jobson, Cyrus Griffin, Richard Burton and others, African Muslims were seen as “Moors.” These tropes are based on the colonial demand to inscribe a partial other who reflects the virtues of western civilization, but who also stands different enough not to contest European claims to supremacy.

Interestingly, Bhabha suggests that the partial and ambivalent nature of mimicry also makes it “one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge” (85). Bhabha writes that “mimicry is like camouflage, not a harmonization or repression of difference, but a form of resemblance, that differs from or defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically” (90). The colonized individual can never become a “model.” The process of colonization/slavery/imperialism creates an “Other” that remains similar, but fundamentally apart, foreign. In turn, the colonized realizes that he or she can never become the model, and takes a life of his or her own, not restricted by attempting to imitate an ideal concept, but serving his or her own purpose dictated by transformation. In other words, he or she does not attempt to become a model, but revolts against it and forces his or her own trajectories and sense of difference. In this regard, mimicry is “an ontological weapon” that destabilizes western forms: “‘partial’

representation rearticulates the whole notion of *identity* and alienates it from essence” (89). This chapter shows that mimicry is a type of imitation of the imperial ruling class that does not produce an accurate recreation or presentation; instead, it reproduces an altered image that is not exact. New types of resistance and subversion are possible in this partial representation of the ruling class, which enables the subjugated other to manufacture new forms and strategies of resistance.

We can read Ayuba and ar-Rahman attempting to maintain an African Muslim code or milieu as they negotiate a recoding with the West. These writers know how to push the creative boundaries of identity formation even as whites attempt to insinuate the appellations: Noble Savage and Moor. We can read in these narratives interesting and inventive modes of mimicry that resist the dominance of established racial orders and challenge traditional western figurations of black identity.

Thomas Bluett and the Negotiation of Mimicry

Unfortunately, there were not many written accounts provided by Ayuba Suleiman Diallo. Only *Some Memoirs* and a handful of letters survive. There must be a fair amount of conjecture in studying Ayuba. Nonetheless, despite Bluett’s attempt to write into real life a fictional character, there are enough gaps in the narrative that seem to reveal a sense of Ayuba’s persona and reasoning. From these moments, not only can we determine how westerners’ overwrote minority cultures, but also note the subtle attempts that Ayuba initiated to claim for himself the privileged status of a rational being. A crucial aspect of this negotiation is Ayuba’s ability to perform to the expectations of

his audience and editor and to use his Arabic as a bridge between cultures. In a sense, much of the narrative and the letter rest on his ability to mimic convention.

Some Memoirs of the Life of Job, the son of Solomon, the High Priest of Boonda in Africa, Who was a Slave about two Years in Maryland, and afterwards being brought to England, was set free, and sent to his Native Land in the Year 1734 was first published in London. It is one of the earliest forms of writing to show the connection between the early development of American identities and Islam. Historically, it was a relatively well-read document throughout the eighteenth century. In 1745, an abridged version of the narrative, combined with Francis Moore's *Travels* was reprinted in Astley's *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels*. Later in the eighteenth century, Ayuba's story appeared in John Newberry's *The World Displayed*. Thanks to his involvement with the early English abolitionist movement, Ayuba's name continued to be associated with the Spalding Gentlemen's Society, an important and influential early London group of leading archaeologists and humanists, until 1816.² Unfortunately, Ayuba's story fell into relative obscurity during the nineteenth century, eventually becoming a historical footnote until being rediscovered in 1967 by Philip D. Curtin in *Africa Remembered*.

The narrative deceptively assumes a traditional construction. It is divided into six sections: an introduction, a section outlining Ayuba's personal history, a section describing Ayuba's affairs in the New World, a section describing Bundu's civil administration, a section describing Ayuba's personality, intellect, and religious beliefs, and a conclusion. In the introduction, Bluett assumes the position of both editor and amanuensis. Here, he seemingly establishes a flexible positional authority that allows him

² Early members included: Sir Isaac Newton, Sir Hans Sloane, Alexander Pope, George Vertue, Dr. William Stukeley, John Anstis.

to take various positions of authority over the African subject. He validates the veracity of the details being presented to the English and employs classical rhetorical strategies to construct an alternative subjectivity that will be “useful” and “entertaining” to his audience. Bluett also dedicates the text to the Duke of Montague who had been an important benefactor to Ayuba. In particular, this serves as a poignant reminder that Ayuba’s friends were very important in gaining his freedom.

Apparently, since there were no “set” terms and relations to regulate the project, Bluett borrows familiar tropes of African subjectivity and creates a compelling narrative of exceptionality. This is significant because Bluett does not possess either the necessary translation skills or direct experience of the African interior. He comes across more naïve than his predecessors and contemporaries like Aphra Behn, John Carter, Joseph Blyth, Thomas Phillips, Willem Bosman, William Snelgrave, and Francis Moore who were actively involved in the “triangle trade” and had direct experience of Africa. Warning his audience of his limitations, Bluett explains that:

I Don’t pretend here, as I hinted before, to trouble the Reader or myself with a full and regular History of JOB’s Country. Those who have the Curiosity to inform themselves more particularly in the History of those Parts of the World, may consult the Voyages that are already published on that Subject. (34)

Apparently, Bluett engages in a discursive strategy that serves as a “moment of interrogation” (Bhabha 71). In this case, as Bhabha suggests, the westerner will attempt to essentialize difference, making it seem normal, preconditioned, and a historical. The western demand for identification becomes “primarily, a response to other questions of

signification and desire, culture and politics” (71). As a response to the western desire for an identifiable “other,” Bluett does not stray far from the Noble Savage tropes located in works by Aphra Behn and charts a narrative that sets Ayuba in opposition to other blacks.

Chapter 2 of the narrative presents an “exception” who seemed more European than African. Ayuba was a native of Bondu who went to the Gambia to sell some slaves to the British. At some point Mandingos kidnap him, and then sell him and his companion to the British. Ayuba endures the Middle Passage, lands in Maryland and is immediately purchased by Mr. Tolsey. Ayuba assumes a position as a tender of cattle, but he does not fit into the routine of the plantation because of his aristocratic disinclination toward heavy labor and his steadfast refusal to abandon the rituals of Islam. While praying one day, a boy kicks dirt in his face, and Ayuba escapes the plantation. He eventually is imprisoned in a southern Pennsylvanian jail. A minister, Thomas Bluett, discovers that Ayuba is a Muslim and attempts to intervene on his behalf. This sets off a chain of events that leads to Ayuba’s owner, Mr. Tolsey, returning him to the plantation and granting him some privileges, including a private quarter to pray and the material to write a letter to Africa to arrange a slave exchange. The letter eventually reaches John Oglethorpe, Director of the Royal African Company in London, who arranges to pay Tolsey Ayuba’s bond in order to transfer him. Once in London, Ayuba enters a privileged position, often working with Sir Hans Sloane and other members of the Royal African Company. He becomes a minor celebrity as a living “Noble Savage,” meets the British Royal Family and even gains the support of the Duke of Montague. In 1734, Ayuba returns to Africa bearing various gifts and the expectations that he will assist the Royal African Company to access the rich gum trade of the region.

Because of his unique qualifications, Ayuba was an important asset that members of the early English abolitionist society and benefactors from the Royal African Company utilized for both civil and economic matters. In particular, Bluett seemed interested in using Ayuba to counter negative African images, especially those coming from English slave-ship captain, William Snelgrave, who published his recollections of the Middle Passage in *New Account of Some Parts of Guinea* that year. In short, Snelgrave contends that the slave trade benefited West African slaves because it spared them from horrible unjust, tyrannical rulers, like the King of Dahomey—a figure noted to practice some form of either human sacrifice or cannibalism on slaves. Snelgrave’s justification of the slave trade provided the basic platform that later supporters of the slave trade would use in their ideological battles with English abolitionists. In many ways, this text reiterated the view and concepts espoused by Willem Bosman’s travelogue, *New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea* (1705). According to J. Robert Constantine, “In a sense Bosman’s attitudes toward African culture generally and Negro character particularly became a prototype for a number of later voyagers during the course of the eighteenth century” (174).

Some Memoirs refutes Bosman’s claims of African stupidity, and Snelgrave’s depictions of African savagery by presenting an educated and literate African society. In Chapter One of the narrative, Bluett uses Ayuba to serve as a type of Noble Savage to counter Bosman’s concept of the “ignoble” savage. In some ways, Ayuba’s narrative foregrounds later responses to Snelgrave from various abolitionists, like Guillaume Raynal who, according to Helen Thomas, “condemned slavery’s denial of the tenets of humanity, reason and justice” (26). More interestingly, Bluett anticipates some of the

ideas that Anthony Benezet advocated in *Some Historical Account of Guinea* (1771). In particular, Benezet wants to move away from negative, simplistic images of blacks and provide a more positive attitude that considers them humans with inalienable rights under God. Bluett's agenda is clearly to situate Ayuba in a discourse of equality and compassion. The question is how exactly does Bluett accomplish this?

In Chapter 3, Bluett transcribes depictions of cultural and religious life in Bondu. He focuses on aspects of Ayuba's heroism and describes hunting lions, "unusual" marriage practices, and fighting Arab marauders who threatened his family's property. Although mired in stereotypes, the section offers a glimpse of Ayuba's personality, his views on religion and his "reason" and "rationality." In many ways, Bluett is most impressed with Ayuba's sense of decorum in his interactions with the English. He does not make errors that establishes him as an "other" and seems interested in fitting into the scheme of the land. For instance, Ayuba suggests that he is "more moderate in his Sentiments than most of that Religion . . . He did not believe a sensual Paradise, nor many other ridiculous and vain Traditions, which pass current among the Generality of the Turks" (89). Ayuba makes clear distinctions against the Turks, and attempts to convince the English to identify with West African Islam. He mimics English prejudices and seeks to subvert them by presenting a familiar alternative just different enough to complicate traditional stereotypes of Islam.

The point seems to be that Ayuba is interested in the English and appears willing to initiate contact and trade. According to Bluett, Ayuba reveals some secrets of the West African interior and assumes the role of the cartographer who translates and transcribes African places to a European sensibility. In one instance, Bluett attempts to ascertain the

nature of the town of Boondu and points out that English maps consider the region's name as "Catumbo;" however, Ayuba corrects him and calls it "Galumbo." In describing the proximity of the Senegal and Gambia Rivers, which the English commonly believed merged at some point further inland, Ayuba claims that "These two Rivers . . . run pretty near parallel to one another, and never meet, contrary to the Position they have in most of our Maps" (13). In another instance, Ayuba takes an interest in the geography of England during the trip from Annapolis to London. Bluett states that "By his good nature and affability he gained the good will of all the sailors who . . . all the way up the channel showed him the head lands and remarkable places; the names of which Job wrote down carefully, together with the accounts that were given him about them" (26). Bluett writes that Ayuba is motivated to learn the names of English place names in case "he met with any Englishman in his country, he might by these marks be able to convince him that he had been in England" (26). This establishes a persona whose opinions are molded by logic and not by passion—possessing the very qualities that David Hume would have trouble believing possible in an African only a few years after this narrative's publication.³

Another instance of mimicry occurs when Bluett relies upon England's most famous Noble Savage, the character of Oroonoko, who was the protagonist of Aphra

³ David Hume writes: "I am apt to suspect the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the Whites. There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion, nor even any individual, eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences. On the other hand, the most rude and barbarous of the Whites, such as the ancient Germans, the present Tartars, have still something eminent about them, in their valour, form of government, or some other particular. Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction between these breeds of men. Not to mention our colonies, there are Negro slaves dispersed all over Europe, of whom none ever discovered the symptoms of ingenuity; though low people, without education, will start up amongst us, and distinguish themselves in every profession. In Jamaica, indeed, they talk of one Negro as a man of parts and learning; but it is likely he is admired for slender accomplishments, like a parrot who speaks a few words plainly" (228).

Behn's *Oroonoko, or the Royal Slave* (1688), as an archetype to mold Ayuba. As Gates shows, Oroonoko possessed many of the attributes of an European King—including “aquiline features,” fluency in French, and high cultivation. Behn depicts Africans in “human” and “sympathetic” terms—in particular, noting that Oroonoko has “nothing of barbarity in his nature” (43). Due to “the perfections of his mind,” “his discourse was admirable upon almost any subject, and whoever had heard him speak would have been convinced of their errors, that all fine wit is confined to the white men, especially to those of Christendom” (44). With such characteristics, Oroonoko was comfortable in either England or Africa. Interestingly, Behn also avoids traditional depictions of savage “ugliness” by presenting a hero who possesses attributes and features that resemble Europeans in important ways. Behn enables the reader to draw a type of affinity to the character that reflects traditional European ideals. A catalyst for this exceptionality was that while there was something “noble” in Oroonoko's nature, he also benefited from European teachers who taught him the basics of European culture. This connects him to the egalitarian ideals of the Enlightenment that were developing during the late seventeenth century, yet keeps him apart as well.

Some Memoirs deploys much of the same terminology found in *Oroonoko*. According to Bluett, Ayuba possesses many similar attributes of “beauty” and “reason” that made Oroonoko an exceptional product of Africa. Through his “affable carriage, and the easy composure of his countenance,” Ayuba “was no common slave” (21-22). His hair, an important point of distinction, is “long, black, and curled, being very different from that of the Negroes commonly brought from Africa” (88). In addition to these physical attributes, Bluett describes Ayuba having: “On all Occasions he discovered a

solid judgment, a ready Memory, and a clear Head.” Although Ayuba possesses “Prejudices which it was natural for him to have in favour of his own religious Principles,” reason and logic drive his worldview. To strengthen this assertion, Bluett also states, “In his Reasonings there appeared nothing trifling, nothing hypocritical or over-strained; but, on the contrary, strong Sense, joined with an innocent Simplicity, a strict Regard to Truth, and a hearty Desire to find it” (88).

More significantly, Bluett relies upon traditional tropes of African nobility to complete this construction and imagines Ayuba as a high ranking member of his society. Ayuba’s grandparents were clerics from Futa Toro who founded Bondu during one of the first Fulani migrations of the late seventeenth century, and his family in some ways held contact with the *satigis* of Futa Toro, they were not actual rulers of the nation and held very little political sway. Nevertheless, Bluett outlines the following genealogy in order to establish Ayuba’s nobility:

About fifty Years ago Hibraham, the Grandfather of JOB, founded the Town of Boonda, in the Reign of Bubaker, then King of Futa, and was, by his Permission, sole Lord Proprietor and Governor of it, and at the same Time High Priest, or Alpha; so that he had a Power to make what Laws and Regulations he thought proper for the Increase and good Government of his new City.” (78)

Bluett believes that a class of Islamic clerics ruled Bondu. Apparently, this fanciful assumption might be attributed to basic matters of mistranslation and miscomprehension. Nonetheless, one must wonder how much Bluett was projecting his own desires into the story. Perhaps that explains why the role of literacy in Bondu takes up so much of his

attention. Seemingly, Bluett considers Bondu's ruling elite as potential ideal trading partners because they are literate and urbane. He describes Ayuba's education in order to validate his point: "*Gelazi* had a son, named *Sambo*, whom he put under the care of *Salumen*, Job's father, to learn the *Koran* and *Arabick* language. Job was at this time also with his father, was companion to *Sambo*, and studied along with him" (14-15). In another section, Bluett describes Ayuba's library:

the Books in his Country are all in Manuscript, all upon Religion; and are not, as I remember, more than Thirty in Number. They are all in *Arabick*; but the *Alcoran*, he says, was originally wrote by God himself, not in *Arabick*, and God sent it by the Angel *Gabriel* to *Ababuker*, some time before *Mahommed* was born; the Angel taught *Ababuker* to read it, and no one can read it but those who are instructed after a different Manner from that in which the *Arabick* is commonly taught. (52-53)⁴

While the notion of literacy provides commonalities with Europeans, Bluett does not have an understanding of its nature. At this point, we need to examine the nature of Ayuba's literacy and to recognize that his writing produces ambivalence and fascinating modes of mimicry that expose the gaps in colonial epistemological schemes.

⁴ It is important to state that literacy was widespread among upper class Muslims in West Africa. In many Muslim towns and villages, the madrasa was the center of Islamic education. Often these schools belonged to a larger organized system where students with sufficient ability would pass one level and then travel to another town to study at a higher level. Traditionally, the cities of Jenne, Timbo, Timbuktu, and Pir were centers of learning where members of the aristocracy or religious class sent their children. At a fundamental level, such historical realities highlight that African Muslim literacy challenged the traditional view that "all literate slaves in United States owed their literacy to their masters" (Alryyes 60).

The Destabilizing Ground of Literacy

While it is difficult to know if Ayuba was conscious or unconscious of this reality, his writing granted him opportunities to traverse new vistas and social spaces. In many ways, Arabic was a passport to new worlds. In the first meeting between Ayuba and Bluett, Arabic plays a significant role in the breakdown of traditional structures of black and white encounters. When presented with Arabic at the Pennsylvania jail, Bluett identifies Ayuba as a “Mahometan” (80). The term does not reveal any ethnological information, bringing up the question of the unknown because Bluett “could not imagine of what country he was, or how he got thither” (80). A revealing moment occurs when Ayuba writes a “letter in Arabick to his father, acquainting him with his misfortunes, hoping he might yet find means to redeem him” (22-23). Diouf explains that the “appearance” of Arabic, and not the content of the letter, is significant:

As some European writers emphasized, for an African to write in the Arabic of the Koran was akin to a European writing in Latin. Whereas Europeans did not routinely write their correspondence in Latin, however, West Africans did write theirs in Arabic, even those enslaved far from their land. Fortunately, Job had written in Arabic, not in Pulaar, which could not have been deciphered at Oxford. (136)

If Diouf is accurate, then the presentation of Arabic literacy plays a significant role in the way westerners depict African subjectivities. Specifically, the problem of the quality of Ayuba’s Arabic leads to larger questions.

It seems that Ayuba was not preparing for a career either in government or in the clergy. The surviving letters that Ayuba produced suggest he employed a type of Arabic

script not commonly used in higher levels of Bondu society. As Philip Curtin argues, Ayuba's association with the world of commerce mandated the type of Arabic that he would need to know. Curtin contends, "The level of his knowledge of Arabic . . . points to the kind of education that might be expected of a *diula*, or traveling merchant, rather than that of an important Islamic scholar" (Curtin 26). In a letter to Sir Hans Sloane, Ayuba shows a rudimentary ability to write in the Maghreb script that was common in northwest Africa. However, the language in the letter was ungrammatical and clumsy. An argument can be made that Ayuba was not able to use Arabic in everyday situations and relied upon wholesale transcriptions of memorized Qur'anic passages to communicate in written form. Clearly, literacy provides Ayuba a cloak of protection.

In another example, we discover that westerners did not seem interested in the content of Ayuba's writing and only sought to have him conform to an existing style and manner of English writing. A letter that Ayuba wrote to Captain Hull remains. Upon cursory glance at the English translation, a conventional letter of gratitude and support appears. Ayuba seems to be thanking his benefactors, employing a polite persona well versed in the genteel tradition of the day. There is an appreciation of the work that the Royal African Company performed in transferring him back to West Africa and there is a desire to support the company's intervention in the region. Holding true to the promise that he made to Bluett in *Some Memoirs*, Ayuba is keen on securing trade between England and Bondu and vows to do his best to make sure that the two nations continue to cooperate. In short, the letter is everything one would expect from an ideal model of virtue and gratitude. However, upon closer examination of the letter, matters are different. According to Ronald Judy's translation, the letter does not actually profess

much in the genteel tradition that Hull and others expected from Ayuba. In fact, Judy's work actually supports Curtin's own analysis of the quality of Ayuba's grammar. Although Ayuba was very clumsy with his writing, he does not rely upon strict memorization of Qur'anic verses and attempts to use Arabic in order to communicate and express original thought. Ayuba states the supremacy of Allah's will in the daily human life and urges the English to consider the ways of the prophet. In this manner, Ayuba intervenes inside western discourses and attempts an inventive form of communication to bridge the gaps between English fantasy and reality. This writing demonstrates an inventive deployment of mimicry and hybridity as a counter to the hegemonic impulses of western civilization.

The presentation of Arabic script in such a context renders a subject outside conventional frameworks of difference: a type of simulation. Glissant writes that "the more the Other resists in his thickness or fluidity (without restricting himself to this), the more expressive his reality becomes, and the more fruitful his relation becomes" (qtd in Britton 18). Within the temporal and spatial spaces in western civilization, Arabic opens trajectories of displacement that counter dominant western modes of thinking and inscription. The clumsiness of his writing is not as important as the incorporeal transformations that each letter and word in Arabic represents. By writing in Arabic, he is manufacturing (deliberately or inadvertently) an identity complete with holes and gaps that others can fill for him. It is porous, no longer strictly a product of the land of Bondu—rather, it is an unstable overlay produced by eager and often well-meaning abolitionists in the name of western venture capitalism. In response to the dominant

typographies of colonial authority, Ayuba is positioned on shifting planes of identities where he disrupts subjectification and then allow others to categorize him.

Philosophical Quandary

Glissant reminds us that stereotypes cannot be countered rationally—rather they must be challenged by the production of a “visible but unreadable image” (Britton 24). Ayuba manipulates English decorum and projects similar virtues that provide what Deleuze and Guattari would consider a type of organizing turbulence in the chaos of racial classification of this period. He is a ripple, from which springs a new way of seeing Africans. Westerners, however, do not have the necessary terminology to understand an opaque subjectivity from West African. In order to translate this process, in a sense to understand this type of ripple, Bluett claims that Ayuba has become a “product” of English civilization; however, there is a marked sense of ambivalence here that suggests that this categorization is fraught with awkwardness and indeterminacy that does not lend easily to already inscribed western codifications of African identity:

It would be Presumption in us to affirm positively what God is about to do at any Time; but may we not be allowed humbly to hope that one End of JOB's Captivity, and happy Deliverance, was the Benefit and Improvement of himself and his People? His Knowledge is now extended to a Degree which he could never have arrived at in his own Country; and the Instruments which he carried over, are well adjusted to the Exigencies of his Countrymen. Who can tell, but that thro' him a whole Nation may be made happy? The Figure which he makes in those Parts, as

Presumptive High-priest, and the Interest which he has with the King of the Country, considering the singular Obligations he is under to the *English*, may possibly, in good time, be of considerable Service to us also; and we have reason to hope this, from the repeated Assurances we had from JOB, that he would, upon all Occasions, use his best Endeavours to promote the *English* Trade before any other. But whatever be the Consequences, we cannot but please our selves with the Thoughts of having acted so good and generous a Part to a distressed Stranger. And as this gives me occasion to recommend Hospitality, I cannot conclude, without saying something in favour of it. (59-60)

The point here is that this “Stranger,” despite being molded by his encounter with the English, is still an enigmatic concept who represents a fearful alien nature that does not necessarily lend to easy transcription. While other slaves and former slaves like Phyllis Wheatley and Olaudah Equiano experienced a similar story of codification, they still remained bound and determined by the western conventions of race that they had to eventually recodify and hybridize. Ayuba, however, manages to elude this type of inscription, and enters a displaced transcultural zone that is not easily negotiated by western knowledge.

Toward the conclusion of the narrative, Bluett responds to Ayuba’s displacement by asserting that he is a problematic identity that becomes a matter of philosophical inquiry. Presented with a complication, Bluett attempts to shed some light on this problematic identity by arguing for Ayuba’s favorable ranking within the Great Chain of Being as a temporary solution to a complex issue of categorization. This brings up the

complex negotiations going on in Europe about the “ranking” of Africans. As figures like Carolus Linnaeus, Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach considered, human beings could be conceivably ranked, sorted and categorized according to specific physical or phenotypical features. Subsequently, the question of categorization came to symbolize the crucial question of who could participate in the bounds of the modern nation state and who could occupy the ranks of the slave class. Admittedly, while Bluett was writing during a period when racial classification was in its infancy, there is a marked sense of ambivalence about his project that shows that the English imagination of the region was severely limited, and understanding the nature of Africa was something they needed to take up carefully. Using his narrative as a tentative beginning point in the understanding of the region, Bluett recognizes, “tis true, neither the Extent of our Lives nor Capacities will permit us to view any very great Part of the Works of God; and what we do see, we are too apt to a put a wrong Construction upon” (56). In this case, western methods of codification are inadequate for the task of understanding complex African subjectivities and that a language of exchange needed to be produced.

Ayuba’s narrative is a minor West African intervention written during the early period of English abolitionism and English penetration of West Africa. Bluett attempts to understand the nature of a complex identity and in the process confronts the opacity of the other. Bluett relies upon unstable stereotypes within the western cultural imagination to pin this subject to a fixed unit of understanding. However, Ayuba’s literacy in Arabic and ability to manipulate his benefactors through mimicry destabilizes this concept of understanding. What results is a sense of displacement where Ayuba fashions his Arabic

writing as an inventive method of communication that hybridizes the dominant power discourse of his benefactors and produces an expressive mode of communication that his western counterparts cannot totally understand. Ultimately, Bluett comes to understand the limitations of western inscription and seeks an alternative manner of engaging the African subject. In many ways, Bluett's negotiations of the "other" sets up the more complex and fascinating story of Ibrahima Abd ar-Rahman in the United States.

Ibrahima Abd ar-Rahman: Performing Moorishness

The narratives by ar-Rahman render subjectivities opaque, creating lines of flight to fantasy lands that undermine western attempts to inscribe and encode him into a fixed concept of knowledge. A type of mimicry develops here, but he does not attempt to imitate a "real" identity, but performs as a Moorish concept. Although he "wrote" or contributed to many narratives, and there are many "ar-Rahmans" in circulation that offer varying images and impressions, we can still gain a sense of his perspective and recognize that he was conscious of this performance. For instance, when transmitting his story to Cyrus Griffin, he claims that "not a drop of Negro blood runs in his veins" and insists that "he places the Negro in a scale of being infinitely below the Moor" (135). Apparently, ar-Rahman understood the racial environment in the United States and seems to engage a process of "becoming," where he does not settle into any fixed or essentialized identities, but moves one performance to the next as he seeks manumission for his family and himself.

Ibrahima Abd ar-Rahman was born in Timbo, Futa Jallon in 1762. He was the son of the powerful Fulani chief, Ibrahima Yoro Pate Sori. Ar-Rahman went to school in

Timbuktu and Timbo, where he received a traditional Muslim education. Since ar-Rahman was the son of a powerful chief, he also learned the languages of the Mandakan group to prepare for a career in government. However, these plans changed when in 1788, a band of fetish soldiers ambushed his war party and captured him. For the next year, he endured various ports of the Middle Passage, and eventually reached Natchez, Mississippi where Thomas Foster purchased him. According to the narrative Thomas H. Gallaudet produced, ar-Rahman let Foster know about his aristocratic origins. Terry Alford speculates that “it is possible his remarks were translated by a Mandinka intermediary, for several lived in Pine Ridge and a teen-age Mandinka boy resided on the neighboring grant” (43). Much like Ayuba, ar-Rahman wanted to negotiate a slave exchange and return to Africa. According to Alford, Foster was a farmer with yeoman origins, not very well educated, who was not very sympathetic to an African aristocrat. As Gallaudet explains, “His story was not credited,” and Foster paid “no attention to his royal blood.” As if to complete ar-Rahman’s humiliation, Foster named him “Prince” and refused to consider the matter. Without fanfare, in a story reminiscent of Ayuba and most slaves, Foster forced ar-Rahman into hard manual labor.

Ar-Rahman encountered a different American setting than Ayuba experienced just fifty years earlier. For instance, Natchez was being transformed from a foreign possession into an American city. Historically, the city had been at the center of a border dispute between the United States and Spain. Although the Treaty of Paris (1783) stipulated otherwise, the town of Natchez was still in Spanish possession following the conclusion of the Spanish-Anglo War, 1779-1783. The Treaty of San Lorenzo (1795) settled the territory dispute between Spain and the United States with the Spanish ceding

all formal claims to Natchez. However, the United States did not take formal possession of the territory until 1798. A week after the departure of the Spanish soldiers, Natchez became the territory's capital. Throughout the disputed years, the region experienced a population boon. The Foster family had moved from South Carolina to the region in 1783, as part of larger wave of immigrants encouraged by the Spanish government's liberal policies and tolerant attitudes.

Ar-Rahman found a small community of yeoman farmers, often living on isolated farms. For all practical purposes, the region was the national frontier. One major issue for blacks was that white planters did not purchase their slaves directly from West Africa; instead, they purchased them from the Caribbean, where many blacks had been separated from their own ethnic and language group. Life on the frontier meant close contact with the slavemaster's family and other slaves from all points of the Black Atlantic. Although slaves could intermingle outside the farm on select days, maintaining close ethnic connections was often difficult. In this case, a natural consequence for the various ethnic groups of Africa was a type of acculturation into the southern system of slavery and eventual codification into the western racial system of difference.

At first, Ar-Rahman did not voluntarily submit to Foster's authority. One major issue was that Foster cut ar-Rahman's hair and clean shaved his head. West Africans viewed such a gesture as an insult. Work in the tobacco fields was humiliating and it did not take long for ar-Rahman to run away. As Austin discusses, the potential for freedom was remote at best. Although located at the frontier, there were not many options for ar-Rahman. He survived in the open using the skills that he had developed in the military. However, what chance did he have in unfamiliar terrain, surrounded by slavers, tracking

dogs, and their white patrollers? Ar-Rahman realized the futility of his actions, and after three weeks returned to the plantation. According to Natchez legend, he approached Sarah Foster, Foster's wife, accepted her hand, knelt before her, and placed her foot on his neck.

We must understand that there are deeper connotations involved with this dramatic gesture of ar-Rahman's acceptance of slavery that require us to ask how he viewed slavery. Alford suggests that ar-Rahman accepted bondage and that he "was placing his life in the hands of the Fosters. If they wanted him back, here he was; if they wanted to kill him, they could do that, too" (47). Assuming Alford is correct, an additional complication arises: how did ar-Rahman compare American slavery to African slavery? Ar-Rahman might have used the gesture to buy himself time and to nurse an internalized belief that manumission would eventually come. Such a belief does not sound farfetched in the context of the way the Fulanis practiced slavery. As Diouf suggests, "the manumission rate in the Islamic world was systematically higher than anywhere else" (13). There is also the strong possibility that ar-Rahman was acclimating himself to the Natchez community by accepting its standards of law and behavior.

The clearest example of ar-Rahman's acclimation is that he married a black slave, named Isabella, who was a Baptist. She used take ar-Rahman to Christian services. Alford writes that "as he came to understand English, he was avid to have the Christian beliefs explicated" (79). Their five sons were raised Christians, not Muslims. One son, Simon, became a Baptist preacher. Apparently, ar-Rahman believed that raising their children in a faith with an active community of support was a logical decision. There is also the reality that ar-Rahman converted to Christianity. Considering that his

background in Islam was not thorough, aside from learning the basic prayers and rituals of the average believer, ar-Rahman did not present himself as a marabout or religious scholar as in the case of Bilali Mohammad (who will be discussed in Chapter 3). He would have had an easier time intersecting Islamic and Christian beliefs.⁵

Conversion did not mean that he stopped criticizing perceived religious hypocrisy. One obvious problem was the discrimination that blacks experienced from various denominations. Presbyterians in the area did not encourage black converts. Only the Baptists and the Methodists seemed inclined to accept black members. There was also the apparent hypocrisy of Christians slaving fellow Christians that bothered him. In Africa, Muslims were allowed to enslave fellow Muslims only under very special circumstances. There did not appear to be such restrictions in the United States. According to Cyrus Griffin, ar-Rahman revealed that “[He] admires its [moral] precepts. His principal objections are, that Christians do not follow them . . . He points out very forcibly the incongruities in the conduct of those who profess to be the disciples of the immaculate Son of God.” Positioning himself as a dissenting voice, a right earned through his transatlantic experiences, and many decades in slavery, ar-Rahman makes a poignant critique: “I tell you. . . the [New] Testament very good law; you [Christians] no follow it; you no pray often enough; you greedy after money. [If] you good man, you join the religion. [But] you want more land, more neegurs [sic]; you make neegurs work hard, make more cotton. Where you find dat in your law?”

⁵ Much like Ayuba, ar-Rahman would have had trouble believing in the concept of the Holy Trinity. As Alford suggests, “but he could not accept Jesus as the Son of God or agree that his place in Heaven was higher than Mohammad’s” (81).

In 1807, ar-Rahman's story took an unexpected turn when he encountered a white man named Dr. Cox in Natchez. In the 1780s, Dr. Cox had been shipwrecked in West Africa and nearly died from a fever. Fulani tribesmen brought him to the city of Timbo; news of the doctor's discovery roused Sori, himself, to authorize medical treatment. Dr. Cox spent the next six months living in Futa Jallon, in time becoming friends with the royal family, including ar-Rahman, before returning to the British on the Gambia. Thirty years later, in Natchez, Dr. Cox wanted to show his gratitude and buy ar-Rahman's freedom. Unfortunately, Foster refused to sell ar-Rahman. Dr. Cox tried several more times to help ar-Rahman, but never gained Foster's approval. He eventually passed away without accomplishing his goal.

This episode helped ar-Rahman to gain some status as a local celebrity. Twelve years later, Andrew Marschalk, a local newspaper editor, became interested in ar-Rahman's story and invited him to his printing shop for an interview. At some point, ar-Rahman requested to view a book of fonts, which contained some Arabic fonts. Pleased that he saw Arabic script for the first time in forty years, ar-Rahman produced a facsimile in an elegant and handsome handwriting. Subsequently, Marschalk believed that ar-Rahman was actually Moroccan. It is likely that ar-Rahman's imprecise English played a role in this confusion. There is also the possibility that ar-Rahman was being elusive in his ethnological information. Echoing Ayuba's story a century earlier, ar-Rahman asked to write a letter to Africa. Marschalk became convinced that a grave injustice had happened to ar-Rahman and agreed to help him send the letter. According to Alford, however, ar-Rahman waited at least another six years, until 1826, before producing one

for Marschalk. The most likely catalyst for the letter was that Foster sold one of ar-Rahman's daughters, giving ar-Rahman the motivation to change his fate.

As will become apparent, ar-Rahman had started to develop some interesting ideas about the potential use of his Arabic. Perhaps during the time he had spent practicing his script in the sand, using a stick, he had come to understand the interconnection between identity and language in the United States. By this point, he knew that slavemasters discouraged their slaves from learning to read and write. In order to expose himself to Marschalk, he must have known that Arabic literacy meant something "different" in the southern landscape. At this stage, it is useful to examine the significance of literacy during this period in order to understand ar-Rahman's maneuver.

The Question of Antebellum Literacy

Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life* offers a helpful model because he would have been learning to read right around the time of ar-Rahman's writing. When Douglass discovers an issue of the *Columbian Orator*, he claims that his "soul was set all on fire" (*Narrative* 151). This desire rekindles his passion to read, something encouraged by his master's wife Mrs. Auld, which was suppressed by Mr. Auld. Douglass writes that:

[Mr. Auld] at once forbade Mrs. Auld to instruct me further, telling her, among other things, that it was unlawful, as well as unsafe, to teach a slave to read. 'Now,' said he, 'if you teach that nigger . . . how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master.

As to himself it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make discontented and unhappy.

Apparently, the connection between literacy and freedom resonated quite profoundly for the young Douglass who understood that “what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty, to wit, the white man’s power to enslave the black man From that moment, I understood the pathways from slavery to freedom.”

Douglass describes reading and writing as powerful concepts that represent agency and the power to control one’s own destiny. He writes that “its sympathy for my brethren in bonds—its scathing denunciations of slaveholders—its faithful exposures of slavery—and its powerful attacks upon the upholders of the institution--sent a thrill of joy through my soul, such as I had never felt before!” (151). According to Baker, Douglass establishes the “the black autobiographer’s quest for being” through the acquisition of literacy (Baker 245). In this case, the narrative provides the prototypical framework of progress towards freedom and self-awareness:

When clarified and understood through language, the deathly, terrified nothingness around him reveals the grounds of being. Freedom, the ability to chose [sic] one’s own direction, makes life beautiful and pure. Only the man free from bondage has a chance to obtain the farthest reaches of humanity. From what appears a blank and awesome backdrop, Douglass wrests significance. His subsequent progression through the roles of educated leader, freeman, abolitionist, and autobiographer marks his firm sense of being. (Baker 248)

Baker identifies the necessity for blacks to choose their own direction and to stake a place on the cultural and literary terrain of the nation on their own terms. It is not simply about “freedom.” It is about moving beyond the apparent limitations inscribed by white racial thought and constructing a new sense of self and destiny.

Historically, the question of teaching slaves to read had been an ongoing issue in the American south. Jill Lepore writes that teaching slaves to read had not been illegal prior 1820 in many parts of the country. During the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, planters had been interested in converting slaves to Christianity. For many, teaching slaves to read the Bible seemed like a logical way to control the population, with the goal being to preach docility and the reward of an afterlife. Apparently, planters did not anticipate that the Bible would be used to foment resistance and challenge the epistemological foundations that justified slavery.

Some states questioned the “logic” of educating slaves who could potentially organize rebellions. For instance, after the 1739 Stono Rebellion, South Carolina passed legislation that prohibited teaching slaves to read and write. After 1800, the South Carolina legislature strengthened the earlier provision and banned any kind of “mental instruction” (Williams 13). South Carolina extended its prohibitions to include free African Americans. Other states had their own provisions as well. Georgia passed a statute to punish anyone carrying printed material “for the purposes of exciting to insurrection, conspiracy or resistance among the slaves, Negroes, or free persons of color” (14). Perhaps the most draconian law in the south was in Louisiana, where anyone caught inciting free or enslaved blacks could be punished by death or imprisoned at hard labor. As Williams argues, southerners recognized that literacy was one of the most

important skills in the South. She explains further, “Indeed, literacy constituted one of the terrains on which slaves and slave owners waged a perpetual struggle for control” (13).

For the abolitionist movement, as early as 1820, literacy became a major weapon against slavery. As Lepore explains, “the association between black literacy and liberation was becoming quite marked in the eyes of both blacks and whites. Specifically, black literacy was closely linked to abolitionist agitation” (125). This was a dangerous reality because, as shown in my brief reading of Douglass, literacy could lead to new types of political agency. A slave who learns to read and write can enter a new political reality and attempt to cause some change—usually by joining the abolitionist movement and challenging the authority of the pro-slavery discourse.

Although ar-Rahman manages to enter these discourses, there is a different agenda with his writing. According to Lepore, he “had no interest in imitating whites’ language or writing” (126). Whereas Douglass tries to destabilize the ground upon which western racism and oppression worked, hoping to problematize the way we construct national identities, ar-Rahman uses Arabic within an experimentative mode, hoping to create paths and direction out of his predicament and into new spheres of meaning and mimicry. By asking Marschalk for help to write a letter to Africa, considering the history of black literacy in the south, he declares that he is not a “Negro.” This is a type of creative adaptation to the circumstances and realities of the slave system of the south.

After ar-Rahman produced the letter, which was most likely a transcription of a verse from the Qur’an, Marschalk authenticated the product with his own cover letter and wrote that “[ar-Rahman] claims to belong to the royal family of Morocco and the object

of his letter, as he states it to me, is to make an inquiry after his relations and with the hope of joining them.” The letter reached the office of Thomas Mullowny, the United States consul in Tangier, Morocco. Mullowny then authenticated the document and declared that “the intention of the letter [-writer] appears to me to prove he is a Moor, as [the text] is taken from the Qur’an to excite an exertion for his relief. The documents appear to be clear of deception” (qtd in Alford 100). After forwarding the letter to the Emperor of Morocco’s pasha, Mullowny was in the center of a flurry of diplomatic efforts and eventually convinced the Emperor to request that the American government rescue ar-Rahman from slavery. To make sure emancipation was possible, Morocco provided the funds to pay for the voyage back to North Africa. In short order, ar-Rahman manages to slip out of slavery by transforming himself into a Moorish captive.

On February 22, 1828, Henry Clay arranged to have ar-Rahman released. An unexpected problem arose when Foster refused to manumit ar-Rahman’s wife, Isabella, and the children. Whereas ar-Rahman was an inconvenience to Foster, Isabella was a midwife who provided a valuable service to the plantation. News spread throughout the surrounding areas that ar-Rahman needed to raise funds to manumit Isabella and some prominent local citizens raised the necessary money, approximately 290 dollars. Foster agreed to free the wife and to future manumissions of the children if adequate compensation reached him—but with one major stipulation: ar-Rahman and his wife had to leave the country immediately. Arrangements were made for ar-Rahman to travel to Washington D.C. to meet the president and then to disembark to Africa. Unfortunately, ar-Rahman was not satisfied because his children were not manumitted. Marschalk recognized that the resources of the local economy were limited and organized for ar-

Rahman a speaking tour of the North to raise the necessary funds. To make the presentation more effective, in a scene that Mark Twain could have effortlessly appropriated fifty years later, Marschalk dressed ar-Rahman in “Moorish” costume. With luck, Marschalk assumed that ar-Rahman would raise the money, have the children freed, and leave for good. Clearly, this suggests that Marschalk was absolutely convinced that ar-Rahman was a captive Moor.

Cyrus Griffin: Constructing the Moor

Around the time of ar-Rahman’s tour of the north, Cyrus Griffin, a lawyer, newspaper editor, and a friend of Marschalk, published four articles in the *Southern Galaxy* about ar-Rahman. He was a relocated northerner trying to make a name for himself in Natchez as an editor. The story of a displaced Muslim seemed like an interesting way not only to help the newspaper, but also to correct a wrong. Interestingly, he was a better-informed ethnologist than Marschalk and believed that ar-Rahman was actually from the West African interior. Of course, he was not an expert on the matter as ar-Rahman managed to deflect his allegiance from the Moroccan family to the royal family of Timbuktu—claiming at some point that his father had actually been the king of the famed city. This additional information only convinced Griffin that ar-Rahman was a Moor with slightly confused origin that did little to change the overall tenor of the story.

In “The Unfortunate Moor,” which serves as ar-Rahman’s first official slave narrative, Griffin explores the basic framework of ar-Rahman’s Moorishness. Apparently with so much riding on ar-Rahman’s new ethnic classification—a transformation that had ar-Rahman wearing a Moorish costume throughout Natchez for a brief session until

entering a steamship for Cincinnati—Griffin wanted to present an accurate picture of the subject for historical and political purposes. The narrative considers several important aspects of the story that are worth covering here. First, Griffin documents the testimony of a “Moor” and presents an alternative form of “truth” that conveys southern benevolence and tolerance; second, he advances that ar-Rahman’s literacy “might be of incalculable importance to the colony of Liberia” (134); and third, he argues that environmental factors caused ar-Rahman physical degradation into a negro.

An interesting question surfaces here: what is so important about a Moor? The Moor is an archaic term that predated the creation of the United States. It developed in the western imagination as a way to represent the lusts and passions of the fearfully “constructed” Orient. As a racial “concept,” the Moor had a complex history. Before the seventeenth century, as Winthrop Jordan argues, the English considered “Moors” as Negroes.⁶ During the later seventeenth century, the use of “Moors” or “Black Moors” started to decline as Europeans entered new lands and developed a new set of terms, or cultural identifiers to account for African difference. As Margo Henricks in “Surveying ‘race’ in Shakespeare” comments:

Of the various semantic registers, typology provided the most efficacious means of defining social differences as the seventeenth century progressed. More and more, phrases such as ‘the English race’, ‘the Irish race’, ‘race of women’, appear with greater frequency. Furthermore, as a

⁶ Jordan explains further that “blackness became so generally associated with Africa that every African seemed a black man.” The historical evidence suggests that during Elizabethan times, Moors were depicted as blacks, and that the two terms *Moor* and *Negro* were used almost interchangeably. Jordan writes that “with curious inconsistency, however, Englishmen recognized that Africans south of the Sahara were not at all the same people as the much more familiar Moors. Sometimes they referred to Negroes as ‘black Moors’ to distinguish them from the people of North Africa.”

result of the colonial and imperialist endeavors of the English, phrases such as ‘black race’ or ‘white race’ begin to displace ‘Moor’, ‘Eithopes’, or the ‘English nation’ as taxonomic classification. (18)

By the start of the nineteenth century, the “Moor” had become a meaningless ethnological term of description. Basically, “Moors” resided in the western imagination as an ambivalent concept, often used in literature to displace “black” characters and to restore western power regimes. For instance, during the nineteenth century, the racial character of Othello caused fierce debates among intellectuals concerned about the nature of representation in literary tradition. In one important historical example, the Romantics considered Othello’s blackness problematic. Samuel Taylor Coleridge argued that Shakespeare imagined a “tawny” Moor instead of a black one. He claimed that poetry had the “power of exciting the sympathy of the reader” and “Negroes” could not “inspire” white western audiences. Actor Edmund Kean entered into this debate and lightened Othello’s skin, which actors of the day performed in black face.⁷ This move initiated what later critics called Othello’s “Bronze Age.” The nature of this debate suggested that westerners viewed African blackness as an innate marker of inferiority and could not reconcile intelligence to blackness.

⁷ Coleridge argues: “As for Iago’s language to Brabantio, it implies merely that Othello was a Moor, that is, black. Though I think the rivalry of Roderigo sufficient to account for his willful confusion of Moor and Negro, –yet, even if compelled to give this up, I should think it only adapted for the acting of the day, and should complain of an enormity built on a single word, in direct contradiction to Iago’s “Barbary horse.” Besides, if we could in good earnest believe Shakespeare ignorant of the distinction, still why should we adopt one disagreeable possibility instead of a ten times greater and more pleasing probability? It is a common error to mistake the epithets applied by the dramatis personae to each other, as truly descriptive of what the audience ought to see or know. No doubt Desdemona saw Othello’s visage in his mind; yet, as we are constituted, and most surely as an English audience was disposed in the beginning of the seventeenth century, it would be something monstrous to conceive this beautiful Venetian girl falling in love with a veritable Negro. It would argue a disproportionateness, a want of balance, in Desdemona, which Shakespeare does not appear to have in the least contemplated” (385-386).

The narrative enters this debate forcing readers to walk a fine line between the “literary” Moor and the ethnologically unstable Moor that seemed either a resident of Morocco or Timbuktu. “The Unfortunate Moor” opens with a central problem: correcting an error of racial categorization that led to the unjust enslavement of an “unfortunate Moor” and, to quote Austin, “to explain away ar-Rahman’s dark skin, thick lips and wooly hair” (*Transatlantic* 80). Griffin claims that ar-Rahman’s uncle, “Abu-Abraham” was “at that time king” of Futa Jallon and suggests that without a doubt “the Prince is a Moor” (*AAMA* 135). Much of the article’s ethnological foundation relies upon ar-Rahman’s own admission that “not a drop of Negro blood runs in his veins” and that “he places the Negro in a scale of being infinitely below the Moor” (135). While such comments are difficult to authenticate, especially with the problem of translation present here, Griffin takes the statement at face value and attempts to address the problem of optic orientation. While from a distance ar-Rahman might look like a “Moor,” complete with his ceremonial garb, he actually appears from close distance to be a “negro.”

In order to resolve this question of appearance, Griffin asserts a dehumanizing correspondence between slavery and the ravages of time and attempts to explain away ar-Rahman’s “negro” hair in a move that challenges the forming science of anthropometry. Griffin claims that when ar-Rahman entered the country, “his hair hung in flowing ringlets far below his shoulders” (135). Slave work, however, forced ar-Rahman to neglect his hair and as a result over time “it has become coarse, and in some degree curly” (135). Such work conditions not only altered his hair, but his skin as well: “His skin, also, by long service in the sun, and the privations of bondage, has been materially changed; and his whole appearance indicates the Foolah rather than the Moor” (135). It is

interesting that Griffin uses the term “Foolah” to represent the “negro” when ethnologists and other observers considered that group as an atypical representation of African racial identity. This reveals not only Griffin’s naivety, but demonstrates the confused air that surrounded ar-Rahman’s classification.

One important foundation for the narrative, aside from ar-Rahman’s words, is the use of outdated environmental causation theories with “modern” craniology. In this manner, the narrative attempts to establish ar-Rahman’s noble and European features. In a later article, Griffin writes that “it is true his lips are thicker than are usually, those of the Moor; but the animal frame is not that of the negro; his eyes, and, in fact, his entire physiognomy is unlike that of any negro we have ever seen” (140). So to deflect attention away from the lips and skin color, Griffin focuses on other parts of ar-Rahman’s physiognomy that made him resemble a European: “And if the facial angle be an infallible criterion the point is established, his being equal and perhaps greater, than most of the whites” (140).

An important aspect of Griffin’s rhetorical strategy is that slavery physically alters human beings, and renders them into degenerate states of nature; however, slavery cannot easily diminish intellect and the will of humans to preserve some semblance of civilization. Ar-Rahman is a “man of intelligence” and a “man of integrity” who managed to preserve himself by continually practicing his Arabic and managing to maintain his dignity (137). One sign of this intelligence is that ar-Rahman is “friendly disposed toward the Christian religion. He is extremely anxious for an Arabic Testament. He has heard it read in English, and admires its precepts” (136). Such rhetoric reminds audiences that ar-

Rahman attempted to prevent himself from turning into a “savage” and desired the possible attributes of Christian civilization.

The narrative enters some tough terrain when the questions of ar-Rahman’s underlying religious sympathies emerge. As already shown, ar-Rahman would criticize Christianity. This forces Griffin to admit that the “Prince was educated and perhaps is still, nominally at least, a Mohamedan” (136). Facing the unstable nature of his project, and the apparent pitfalls involved in labeling African Muslims, Griffin chooses to move past these points to render ar-Rahman sympathetic and not threatening—despite the fact that the story and ar-Rahman’s own motivations are highly suspect.

The conclusion of the narrative affirms that Colonel Foster is “ready to give him up without equivalent,” and that the colony of Liberia could benefit from ar-Rahman’s presence—regardless of the sincerity of his conversion. Griffin’s final point is that American slavery has transformed ar-Rahman into a medium for the advancement of American imperial interests.⁸ Griffin claims that “I cannot persuade myself but that you will seize with avidity an instrument that appears so completely adapted to your wants” (136). Griffin envisions ar-Rahman as “the chief pioneer of civilization to unenlightened Africa” (136). Using literacy in Arabic as a tool of conversion, ar-Rahman will be “armed with the Bible . . . and plant the cross of the Redeemer upon the furthestmost mountains of Kong!” (146). According to Griffin’s reading, ar-Rahman is a subject who can serve as an extension of the State’s ability to impose imperialist ideologies. When confronted with

⁸ In a scene reminiscent of Ayuba’s appropriation by the Royal African Company, Arthur Tappan wanted to use ar-Rahman to foster trade, noting how “Timbuctoo is . . . a place not only of business and power, but as having at least a shadow of civilization” (177). Moreover, he called for Americans to employ ar-Rahman as an intermediary between America and West Africa, suggesting that if “Great Britain had possession of Abduhl Rahahman . . . she would prize her good fortune beyond almost any sum” (178). In short, the appropriation of ar-Rahman’s identity would be “favourable to the interests and honourable to the character of the American people” (178).

indeterminacy, Griffin attempts to understand this concept by inscribing familiar tropes—concepts that ar-Rahman in delicate and understated ways seems willing to affect.

Ar-Rahman Travels North: Transformation, New Forms and Content

While Griffin's article raised some interesting questions about the nature of African Muslim identity, it did not successfully clarify matters. Ar-Rahman's identity, even in later articles by Griffin and other writers, is never completely settled. Apparently, the "Moor" stands in-between two worlds and embodies many fantasies, but it is not a fixed categorization of difference. Once ar-Rahman enters the north to begin fundraising, he evolves from the controlled commodity into the feared enemy of the Christian western state, mimicking the active desires and expectations of his audiences. In order to finish this brief analysis of ar-Rahman's displacement, we must examine the aftermath of the "Unfortunate Moor's" publication and turn to later narratives, one written by ar-Rahman and another one edited by Ralph R. Gurley.

Initially, Ar-Rahman's tour went well and caused a brief sensation with northerners. An editor for *Cincinnati's Republicans* wrote: "The grave looking elderly personage in Moorish dress, who has attracted the attention of many of our citizens for a day or two past, is stated to be, and there seems no doubt of the fact, an African Prince, who was taken prisoner in his youth, and had been nearly forty years a slave in the neighborhood of Natchez" (qtd in Alford 114). Although he drew some interest, finding people willing to give money was difficult. At some point, according to Alford, ar-Rahman "paraded through the streets, accepting from the charitable" (114). He often used this tactic on the National Road from Cincinnati to the Atlantic coast. As ar-Rahman

traveled to various cities, towns and villages along the way, a small company of newsmen followed this interesting story and started calling him the “Prince of Timbuctoo.”⁹

On May 15, 1828, Ar-Rahman reached Washington and met President John Quincy Adams. According to Adams’ diary entry, they held a cordial and brief meeting:

Abdel Rahman is a Moor, otherwise called prince or Ibrahim, who has been forty years a slave in this country. He wrote, two or three years since, a letter to the Emperor of Morocco, in Arabic, in consequence of which the Emperor expressed a wish that this man might emancipated and sent home. His owner, residing at Natchez, Mississippi, offered emancipate him on condition that he should be sent home by the Government. He came in while Mr. [Samuel] Southard [Secretary of the Navy] was with me, and we had consultation how and when he should be dispatched to his home, which he says is Timbuctoo. (541)

Ar-Rahman let the president and Clay know that he did not want to go to Morocco, but preferred to go to Liberia. As Clay writes in his diary: “he expressed a strong desire of going to Liberia, and afterwards, proceeding to his friends in [Futa].” This revelation did not alter the president’s desire to transport ar-Rahman back to Africa. Then in a fascinating instance of agency, ar-Rahman asked the president to manumit his thirteen children. Adams writes: “He says he has left Natchez five sons and eight grandchildren—all in slavery; and he wishes that they might be all emancipated, and be sent with or to him.” Disappointed that ar-Rahman could not be more useful, Adams wished him a speedy return home; unfortunately, he did not offer to purchase the children.

⁹ It is worth noting that this story, to borrow a modern term, did not go viral. By the time ar-Rahman reached Washington D.C., the press moved onto other matters.

At this point Henry Clay saw the opportunity to use ar-Rahman for the American Colonization Society and involved Ralph Randolph Gurley in ar-Rahman's fundraising endeavors.¹⁰ During the next several months, ar-Rahman attended various functions of the ACS—typically producing Arabic writing samples, usually the first verse of the Qur'an called the *al-Fatiha*. At the ACS meeting at the Masonic Hall, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet delivered a speech citing ar-Rahman's importance to the colonization movement and argued that Americans needed to convert West African Muslims in order to spread Christian "civilization" throughout the region.

In the aftermath of manumission, ar-Rahman's attempt to raise money to free his family reads of disjuncture, ruptures and betrayals. He breaks the deal he had with Foster and becomes spokesperson for the American Colonization Society. In the process, he assumes another persona, one hidden behind the Moorish costume that he wears and the written Arabic "prayers" that he reproduces. He often provides samples of his writing for interested audiences, often claiming that they are versions of the Lord's Prayer in Arabic, or simple biographical accounts of his stay in captivity. However, it turns out that ar-Rahman masks his intentions, producing copies of the *al-Fatiha*. This demonstration of his Islamic faith problematizes the authenticity of his conversion to Christianity. It is useful to examine his first "narrative" that he produced in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1828 in order to explore this question further.

The following is a short propaganda piece for the American Colonization Society. Not much is known about the immediate circumstance behind its production.

¹⁰The American Colonization Society (ACS) formed in 1817 to send recently manumitted African-Americans to Africa. In 1822, the ACS founded the Liberian colony.

Nonetheless, it represents the works that he produced while in the north. The original translation reads:

Abdul Rahhahman son of Ibrahim—I was born in the city Timbuctoo (oo)--? I lived there till I was five years old—I moved to country Foota Jallo—I lived in the capital Timbo (Teembo) I lived there till I was twenty five year old—I taking prisoner in the war—I sold to River Gambia—they took me to Natchez—I sold to Mr. Thomas Foster—I lived there forty year—I get liberate last March—1828—October 10 1828. (AAMA 243)

This translation served the purposes of the American Colonization Society, and no one questioned its accuracy. However, a recent translation by Abdulla Basabrain shows an alternative meaning:

Abdul Rahahman, son of Ibrahim, [peace to] Mohammed and to his companions, amen, saith the sheikh to Mecca [illegible], I was born Saturday in ? year ?” In the name of God, the infinitely Compassionate and Merciful. Praise be to God, Lord of all the worlds. The Compassionate, the Merciful. Ruler on the Day of Reckoning. You alone do we worship, and You alone do we ask for help. Guide us on the straight path, the path of those who have received your grace; not the path of those who have brought down wrath, nor of those who wander astray. Amen. (243)

The first translation reads like a conventional slave narrative of the period. It shows a transnational trajectory that starts with the author’s birth in Africa, family history,

subsequent enslavement and manumission. Furthermore, the short piece follows the conventions of the romantic sense of self, specifically the presentation of the “I” narrator. The original translator recognizes that the proclamation of the “I” subject is a crucial component of the biography and writes ar-Rahman’s complex subjectivity into something knowable according to western standards—in effect, the original translation serves to reaffirm normalized ways of transcribing an African-American biography.

A. Basabrain’s translation shows that ar-Rahman produced a different narrative. In this modern version, the conventions of the slave narrative and of the positing of the “I” subject are not as important. Although ar-Rahman establishes the “I” subject, he does not trace a linear personal historiography from birth, enslavement, and to freedom. Instead, he writes to reaffirm his faith and establishes the primacy of Allah’s will before any proclamation of self-agency. The transcribing of the *al-Fatiha*, which the original translator either ignored or did not want made public, represents a formal recognition of the supremacy of Allah’s words and association within the larger Islamic *um ’ma*. In this backdrop, the translator had to “insign” an identity that does not come from direct empirical observation but from a compulsory desire to impose and affirm western codes and formations—the propaganda of the American Colonization Society.

The notion of the Moor is developed further in “Abduhl Rahahman, the Unfortunate Moorish Prince,” a long version of the narrative supposedly penned by Abd ar-Rahman under the guidance of American Colonization Society leader Ralph R. Gurley. The narrative uses an alternative rhetorical strategy than that deployed in Griffin’s articles. Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet claims that “His life appears like a romance and the incidents would be incredible if the evidence was not so undeniable.” Gurley

takes those words and essentially presents the “romance” of the story—documenting the last battle of a Princely Moor.

First, Gurley authenticates the accuracy of the account and then reminds his audience that ar-Rahman needs to raise money to manumit his family. After making this emotional appeal, Gurley argues that ar-Rahman’s story serves the interest of the ACS because ar-Rahman was “anxious to obtain an Arabic testament” and to travel to Liberia to begin missionary work. Thanks to his education and literacy, “he is intelligent, modest and obliging” (*AAMA* 145). He is an ideal candidate worthy of American sympathy and attention. While the narrative follows a traditional structure with ar-Rahman asserting that he was born in Timbuktu, it makes an abrupt turn and recounts the unconventional circumstances that led to his enslavement. Ar-Rahman describes his service in the military, how he rose through the ranks of the military and reached the rank of Colonel because “I had a very good head” (*AAMA* 146). Although he had a good head, he could not spare his small band from being routed by a larger force. Of course, ar-Rahman describes a heroic story that shows him fighting according to his aristocratic heritage. He enters battle wearing gold accouterments and his enemies believe him to be the King of Timbo. At some point, the battle turns, members of his group wish to retreat and ar-Rahman claims that “I said I will not run for an African” (*AAMA* 146). This proclamation is significant because ar-Rahman separates himself from pagan black Africans.

The publication of the narrative signifying that ar-Rahman was shifting allegiances from his former southern benefactors to his new friends in the north. It is not an accident that the figure of the heroic Moor establishes the necessary pathos to affect a

northern audience wanting to abolish the evils of slavery and to foster the repatriation of displaced blacks.

Southern Backlash: The Dangers of Arabic Literacy and the Sword of Islam

In Natchez, Griffin had a difficult time convincing his readers that ar-Rahman was a Moor—the subsequent publication of three more articles and letters from concerned southern citizens makes that point apparent. Some former southern supporters argued that ar-Rahman was mimicking a Moor, responding to newspaper stories that streamed from the north describing ar-Rahman dining with prominent blacks, such as David Walker. Southerners viewed this event as an important turning point in the way and began to regard Arabic literacy in their slaves with suspicion. Once ar-Rahman reached the north, Arabic turned into a dangerous political weapon for abolitionists and supporters of colonization. This abrupt move reminded Southerners that literate slaves were threats to the slave apparatus and abolitionist agitators seemed determined to use literacy as a major weapon against slavery. Apparently, the role of mimicry, the sense of instability and fluidity that it brings, is obvious as ar-Rahman’s literacy turns into a source of contention, playing a minor role in the presidential election of 1828.

During the summer and fall of 1828, there was a fierce exchange of editorials between Marschalk and Griffin about ar-Rahman’s role in the United States. Angered by northern activities, Marschalk found himself defending his earlier “Moorish” authentication of ar-Rahman. Matters turned even worse for him when abolitionist supporters of Adams started to use ar-Rahman for their own cause; this did not sit well with Marschalk, who was a supporter of Andrew Jackson. As the situation with ar-

Rahman continued to unfold, Marschalk wrote an editorial for the *Statesman and Gazette*, direct at Henry Clay and Cyrus Griffin: “This party has several presses under its command, which in the same sheet in which they advocate the reelection of Mr. Adams, are actually exciting the slaves to revolt, by the same species of argument which produced the massacre of St. Domingo. Citizens of the south!” (AAMA 196). In order to exaggerate ar-Rahman’s threat, and separate himself from him, Marschalk eventually claimed that Adams was using ar-Rahman as a tool “to effect his reelection, which is preparing the way for the horrid scene of Haiti to be reached here . . .” (AAMA 215). Afterwards, Griffin noted Marschalk’s hypocrisy in several articles, but recognized that ar-Rahman had been duplicitous in his behavior toward his former southern benefactors, and fell silent in the matter as Marschalk continued with his editorials. Eventually, ar-Rahman’s story started to gain some traction across the area.

P.K. Wagner, occasional contributor to the *Louisiana Advertiser*, entered the controversy between Griffin and Marschalk, and raised fears of the prospects of a literate Moor. If we examine the editorial, Wagner points out that President Adams did not honor the original agreement with Foster and accuses him of manipulating ar-Rahman for abolitionist causes. Wagner writes:

What did Mr. Adams do? Did he comply with the contract and send the negro to Africa? No—What then? He gave the negro a passport and sent him in triumph through the free states, where he is now traveling, and has been since last May, arousing wherever he goes the prejudices of the people against slavery and against the slave holders of the South, thereby making a political diversion in favor of Mr. Adams, and preparing the way

for the ulterior object—emancipation on a large scale. A negro who can read and write the Arabic with facility, thirty years in slavery among the ‘barbarians of Mississippi,’ himself a king, liberated by John Q. Adams—what an irresistible appeal is this to the sympathies and prejudices of the people of the free states! What a powerful argument this is, in favor of reelecting that humane man J. Q. Adams to the presidency, and excluding the slave holder Andrew Jackson! (*A*MAA 214-215)

The Princely Moor has become a target of derision. In essence, Wagner transforms the Moor into negro with a more ominous purpose—he has become a political agent for Adams’ reelection campaign and a direct threat to southern aims to seize the White House. Wagner writes that “If Mr. Adams had sought the world over he could not have found a better instrument than this negro to work upon the prejudices of the people of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York and New England . . . the negro himself being well educated in English and Arabic, shrewd, sensible, ambitious, deceitful and daring” (*A*MAA 214-215). Apparently, Wagner found the narratives that ar-Rahman produced to be extremely dangerous and plays into traditional stereotypes of “Moorish” treachery.

It is interesting that the editorials that were produced during the period never claimed that ar-Rahman was being manipulated and used by northern political interests. They seem to suggest that ar-Rahman deployed a relative amount of agency to betray his southern benefactors for his own personal goals. Wagner is particularly critical in his attacks on ar-Rahman, claiming that he was traveling in a “splendid carriage, at the expense of the government,” promoting dissent and controversy through his narratives and reproductions of the Qur’an. Wagner continues to levy additional charges of conspiracy against ar-Rahman. It does not take involved historical work to figure out that

Wagner's claims are designed to provoke southern anxieties and fears in a highly sensitive political climate. Nevertheless, they provided revealing insights into the dangers of mimicry as an effective weapon against American slavery.

On February 7, 1829, Abd ar-Rahman and his wife left on the Harriet for Liberia. They had raised approximately \$3,500 at the end of the tour. The ACS eventually helped secure the release of eight of ar-Rahman's children once the nastiness of the presidential elections ended. With Jackson in office, Foster's mood lightened considerably and he agreed to sell the burdensome children. Unfortunately, Abd ar-Rahman did not enjoy his freedom for long. Since he was elderly and in frail health, the passage to Africa enervated him considerably. Soon after reaching Liberia, ar-Rahman passed away.

Conclusion

These narratives reveal the interesting territory that literate African Muslims traversed during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Deleuze reminds us that "one of the fundamental tasks of the State is to striate the space over which it reigns, or to utilize smooth spaces as a means of communication in the service of striated space" (D & G 385). In this capacity, the State or the slave apparatus seeks to control slippage between fixed categories of difference and power and to maintain established paths and established orders. Writing in another context, but relevant to the points that Deleuze and Guattari make about the State's function to "subjectify," these narratives show that the State apparatus—early business companies, the newspapers, election boards, and political parties—attempts to regulate the production and commodification of difference. The narratives by Ayuba and Ar-Rahman are intriguing responses that seem to disrupt these mandates and linear trajectories of the State. They do not use literacy on the road to entering the *telos* of western civilization,

but as an experimental attempt to mimic an idealized model of “otherness” and to write themselves outside rigid racial frameworks and into transnational pathways of opportunity. In many ways, these Afro-Arabic documents and their subjects represented a concept or people that could be understood in terms neither of limitation nor of assimilation (Bogue 110). Deleuze reminds us that “Writing is a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed, and goes beyond the matter of any livable or lived experience” (*Essays* 1). In this case, Arabic literacy does not produce subjectively grounded writing; instead, it becomes a portal to alternative expressions of black subjectivity based on opacity and mimicry—a becoming that is between traditional western depictions of blackness and western fantasies about African princes and noble savages. In other words, Arabic is a means of infiltration and agency that offers new expressions, adaptations and transformations that enable Ayuba and ar-Rahman to negotiate the porous boundaries of western modernity and to investigate new forms of being.

This chapter established that early African Muslim narrators used literacy in Arabic to manipulate loose stereotypes and mimic imaginary concepts. The next chapter examines how Lamena Kebe and Salih Bilali draw on their literacy to “assist” the efforts by the American Ethnological Society in order to construct a cartography of the West African experience. Much like Ayuba and ar-Rahman, Kebe and Bilali use their narratives as counter-discourses that challenge and manipulate western depictions and stereotypes of West African civilization. Instead of mimicking colonial desires, these figures adopt different resistance strategies such as illegibility, positionality, and sly civility in order to disrupt and reconfigure slightly the traditional ethnological exchange.

Chapter 2: Linguistic Displacement: Ethno-Philological Examinations of the Slave Narratives by Salih Bilali and Lamena Kebe

The cliché states: necessity is the mother of invention. When it came to the West African interior during the early 19th century, westerners found themselves having to appropriate new modes of analysis. As shown in Chapter 1, westerners usually relied upon familiar stereotypes in order to understand the interior. However, there were apparent limitations to this approach. One group, the African Association,¹¹ resolved to separate fiction from truth and sponsored the early ill-fated expeditions by Simon Lucas, John Ledyard and Daniel Houghton to bring back empirical data of the region.¹² They finally succeeded in producing tangible results with Mungo Park's exploration in 1795. Although he managed to reach the Niger, the Bambara capital of Segou and to visit various Fulani towns, Park could not penetrate deep enough to access Timbuktu and this failure reminded westerners of the dangers attempting such a journey.

Mungo Park's expedition, though, established that "civilized" Africans existed in the interior who would be willing to establish trade relations with the English. This was important considering the states of various European governments in the 1790s with their lost territorial possessions, restless colonial populations, and declining economic fortunes thanks to intra-European conflicts. Penetrating West Africa meant opening a new market, replenishing the imperial treasuries and reimagining the public discourse on imperialism. As Mary Louise Pratt suggests, this impetus enabled the West to "remap" Africa based on "new legitimating ideologies: the civilizing mission, scientific racism, and technology-

¹¹ Also known as the Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa.

¹² See Mary Louise Pratt for an in depth historical account of these failures, 71.

based paradigms of progress and development” (74). Of course, this did not minimize the problems of placing people on the ground and having them chart out a reliable map.

In the United States, the American Ethnological Society sought a novel way to address the problem of understanding the West African interior. American Ethnologists William Hodgson Brown and Theodore Dwight, Jr. (working independently), considered the potential of using African Muslim slaves as qualified informants. The previous chapter already showed that some westerners had proposed this idea in order to establish trade routes to West Africa. Dwight and Hodgson advocated a more systematic approach based on brief interviews and intense ethnological examination. The idea was that educated African Muslims could provide accurate information about the ethnology, topography, and philology that would assist missionaries, researchers and explorers. In the grander scheme of ethnological study, such an approach was interesting considering that most ethnographers did not generally pay much attention to the slaves living in the United States.

I argue that the narratives Lamena Kebe and Salih reveal that limited ethnological contact with “privileged informants” cannot produce accurate results. This only leads to a partial understanding of source cultures that inevitably forces the ethnologist to rely upon the imagination or on stereotypical tropes. In many ways, this is not surprising, as Stuart Hall suggests, “until the nineteenth century most of what we would now label as ‘ethnographic’ objects were collected in a spasmodic and fortuitous way, acquisitions whose value lay in their novelty or ‘curiosity’” (Hall 161).

Consequently, these narratives reveal words, assemblages and interpretations that escape the ethnologists’ univocal perspective and desire for linear narration or accounting

of the self. As Bilali and Kebe enter the dominant authoritative power discourse, they partially evade the ethnologists' narratorial voice by exposing cracks, fragmentation, and inconsistencies in ethnological discourse. In many ways, these narratives allow us to consider carefully the production of truth and authority in ethnological testimony and in the process to show how Bilali and Kebe negotiated the traditional concepts of power, ownership and identity. In this regard, these informants do not satisfy the colonizer's demand for recognition, and attempt, to borrow a phrase from Moore-Gilbert, to "elude the subject positions to which the dominant order seeks to confine the other in order to confirm itself as dominant" (Moore-Gilbert 132).

First, the chapter explores the short narrative by Salih Bilali and the difficulty of translating an "authentic" image of a Hausa into a concept of western study. Salih is adrift between cultures as he transmits Fulani words, concepts and meanings to an ethnographer who cannot move beyond his own codes of colonial signification. Salih occupies an ambiguous position on the topological map of Africa where place names, spellings and etymologies are constantly shifting in the miscommunication of the ethnological encounter. Since names and experiences are not repeated effectively to produce an authoritative discourse, Salih slips between the gaps and complicates the linguistic mapping of Africa. This produces an alternative discourse of displacement that makes the "self" an orthographic problem of transcription. Unfortunately, Salih is not given the opportunity to voice his opinions directly in the narrative—luckily, he can still articulate indirectly his voice by foregrounding some of the complicated work by Lamena Kebe.

The second half of the chapter reads the unique narrative by Lamena Kebe, who as a privileged informant is given the opportunity to directly voice his opinions, attempts to contribute new concepts and source words to ethnologist Theodore Dwight, Jr. A point of focus here is the exchange between Kebe and Dwight and western science's imaginary identification with Jakhanken pedagogy. I propose that we can read something that Homi Bhabha calls "sly civility" where Kebe renders Dwight's attempts to construct a proper etymology of the Jakhanken language as ambiguous. This encounter suggests that Dwight cannot gain information easily from Kebe because he constantly interjects a Sufi perspective, despite his supposed conversion to Christianity. Kebe deploys an African teaching pedagogy called "doubling," forcing Dwight to learn how to transcribe spoken words in both Sereculeh and in Arabic into English, which leads to heterography, miscommunication and misdirection.

Salih Bilali's Narrative and the Question of the Face

In examining Salih Bilali's narrative, many of the basic tropes of Afro-Arabic narratives that have been already discussed materialize. Salih was a literate, Muslim Fulani; he did not consider himself a "negro;" and he established himself in the United States by leaving behind a narrative that blurred the boundaries between ethnology and slave narrative. His editors William Brown Hodgson and Thomas Couper attempt to construct and commodify his identity in order to serve western science. This means establishing a panoptical vantage over an imaginary West African topography by producing an ethnological order that organizes this fluid space into fixed modes of

production and consumption. Salih's narrative however complicates this ambition to transcribe origins and according to Hodgson in *Notes on Northern Africa, the Sahara and Soudan* presents "itself as a curious and important subject of philosophic speculation" (52). The concept or mask that Salih represents resists a stable etymology and enables him to make the topological and philological terrain fundamentally unstable.

The reason behind the creation of Salih's narrative is William Brown Hodgson, member and founder of the American Oriental Society and the American Ethnological Society. From 1826-1842, he served in the American Foreign Service, first in Algiers, and then in Istanbul, where he took an interest in African culture and ethnology. He later held governmental positions under the administrations of both John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson. By 1843, he had returned to Georgia and become owner of the Telfair Plantations. There, he used his expertise in language and ethnology to conduct interviews with African born slaves. He concluded that African Muslims could benefit western ethnology because they were "important to science; as no European has yet visited that region of Africa, which lies immediately south of Algiers" (iv). Relying upon his connections to other plantation owners like Thomas Couper, Hodgson gathered an impressive array of research notes on local African Muslims. He ultimately presented a paper to the Georgia Historical Society entitled "The Foulahs of Central Africa and the African Slave Trade" in 1843 and then in 1844 published *Notes on Northern Africa, the Sahara and Soudan*.

When it came to motivation, Hodgson was no different from other ethnologists interested in opening Africa to western colonialism. He believed that the Fulani held the

key to unlocking the interior's secrets and spreading "civilization" to other groups: "the Foulahs are now exercising a powerful influence upon the moral and social condition of Central Africa" (52). Perhaps more crucially, Hodgson anticipated the geo-strategic importance of the Fulanis: "the Fellatahs will probably erect one vast empire in Soudan, and the influence which that power may exert in the great question of African civilization, gives to them no ordinary importance" (52). The question became how to incorporate the Fulani within the growing field of ethno-philology?

Hodgson first tried to debunk the attempts by European philologists Reverend Macbair of Wesleyan Mission and M. D'Eichthal of Paris to position the Fulani language. MacBair argued for the interconnection between the Fulani and the Kaffers of South Africa by claiming their common descent from the Phoenicians. M. D'Eichthal countered this claims by suggesting that the Fulanis were descendants of the Malay group, wanting to posit support for his Polynesia thesis of mankind's cradle of origin. Hodgson refuted these claims and placed Fulani origins in Africa. The question was how. Hodgson did not have a clear answer. The main problem was that:

sufficient materials do not exist, for the proper investigation of the Foulah language. Our vocabularies are very limited, and nothing is known of the structure of the language. It is this grammatical idiosyncrasy, which is now required by comparative philology. This science has made great advances, and in the study of anthropology, it demands the internal structure of language. (67)

Interestingly, Hodgson turned to a black and white picture of a Hausa in Pritchard's *Natural History of Man* (1843) to provide a starting point for deciphering the mystery that the Fulani represented. Hodgson asked his fellow plantation owners whether they had any slaves who fit the description. It turned out that Hodgson's good friend, James Couper owned such a slave: Salih Bilali. Although Salih was actually a Fulani, a traditional enemy of the Hausa, his presence seemed to serve Hodgson's purposes well in order to lay the groundwork for his own theories of ethno-philology. Couper decided to assume the responsibility of being an ethnologist and interviewed Salih about his life, culture and language. Afterwards, he handed over a short letter/slave narrative to Hodgson who eventually authenticated it and then included it at the end of a chapter about Fulani ethno-philology.

It is important to establish that reading the narrative without the portrait of the Hausa is impossible. Couper engages both the portrait and the real-life Salih in one translating act as he positions himself as a chief transcriber for the regime of power that American ethnology represented: "the portrait of a *native of Haoussa*, in Pritchard's *Natural History of Man*, gives the general character of his head and face, and approaches more nearly to it, than that of any other given of the African tribes" (74). He encounters from the start of the project what postmodernists would eventually consider the notion of the "faciality."

Deleuze and Guattari argue that the human face stands at the crossroads between the very mechanism of signification and subjectivation. In many ways, "faciality" is "the white wall/black hole system" that enables us to see this system semiotically as two axes

of significance and subjectivation (D & G 169). The signification is the black hole or opaque region of the face where the subject invests energy while subjectivation is the white wall surrounding the face where signs emanate, and reflect. In this manner, the face is a deterritorialized topography of planes, surfaces, and holes. The face serves several purposes: it makes the rest of body make sense; it is a machine that “engages” the world; and it is “a surface: traits, lines, wrinkles; a long, square, triangular face; the face is a map” (170). Deleuze and Guattari state:

The faciality machine is not an annex to the signifier and the subject; rather; it is subadjacent (connexe) to them and is their condition of possibility. . . . It is precisely because the face depends on an abstract machine that it does not assume a pre-existent subject or signifier; but it is subjacent to them and provides the substance necessary to them. What chooses the faces is not a subject . . . it is faces that choose their subjects. (180)

The face is what constitutes the basic essence of humanity; however, it does not demand a humane treatment. Instead, it transmits signs and forces the viewer to seek meaning from the opaque regions.

The Hausa portrait is in black and white. The figure is dressed in what appears to be traditional Islamic dress: a long robe of indeterminate color and a traditional *kufi* or skullcap. Without a detailed body, the face becomes a site of conflict within the mind and imagination of the European. The face becomes a “concept” or “exception” that breaks the Fulani away from the general black “body” of Africa. Deleuze and Guattari write:

“facialization operates not by resemblance but by an order of reasons” (170). The Hausa’s expression reflects an inquisitive aura that signifies a sophistication that many Europeans considered missing from other Africans. He possesses a “European-like” nose, lips and cheekbones. His eyes are round, innocent, and reflect a type of morality and cultivation. There are African tribal markings/tattoos on his face, as well. A paradox defines the face that stands on the cusp between two levels of civilization. The portrait becomes dependent upon the arbitrary relationship between signification and meaning. Couper confronts interconnecting axioms on the face that shift, where different signs distort meaning. This makes the face a blank map that requires western intervention to encode, define and ultimately to assign a fixed etymology.

The narrative begins to fill the holes, the spaces, providing a “singular” history to that picture—the overwriting of the Hausa picture with an “authentic” Fulani stand in. Couper first struggles with the particularities of language, as he writes “down all names as nearly in accordance with his pronunciation, as the difficulty of seizing upon, and expressing the peculiarities of a foreign language will admit of” (69). There are many languages on this shifting terrain that flow into each other. Couper does not recognize that he has to be a pioneer much like those explorers that had not only to penetrate the African bush, but the limitations of their empirical methodologies and world views. So he opens the experimental slave narrative on the plantation and establishes his discursive authority where the slave falls under the scrutiny of the western gaze within a familiar linguistic terrain. Simply put, an ontological anchoring here ensnares the “exceptional”

within the “fixed” terrain or territory of the known slave apparatus and the unfamiliar is encoded.

There are already “about a dozen or so negroes on this plantation who speak the Foulah language.” But their authenticity is problematic because they are not “native-born Foulahs . . . and acquired the language by having been for sometime in servitude among that nation.” Why is this an issue? Couper is governed by a linear trajectory that seeks a specific form of meaning that renders the Hausa image readable. These “black” slaves with knowledge of the language cannot qualify because they cannot provide accurate source-words and concepts to account for themselves. Salih, though, represents an “original” linguistic order or authority and therefore is an appropriate resource. In other words, Salih represents a different type of commodity made “remarkable . . . for his opportunities . . .” (Hodgson 86).

As a plantation owner, Couper already had certain ideas about the worth of the languages of black Africa.¹³ It was widely believed that language was an innate representation of national psychology. Condillac was one the earliest individuals to suggest that “each language expresses the character of the people that speaks it” (qtd in Alter 5), representing one of the best sources of identifying individual traits or particularities of different peoples. Language was a mirror to a people’s psychological state and, more importantly, could determine that particular people’s character. Some westerners considered the natural speech of the “negro” as being simplistic, relying upon

¹³ For instance, Couper expressed his opinion in a conversation with Fredrika Bremer that [Negroes were] “a tropical race who typify the highest state of the life of feeling; in them the imagination dominates over reason, rendering them deficient in the power abstract thought, of speculative systematization, and incapable of pursuing the strict laws of reason” (*AMAA* 377).

“monosyllabic interjections, diphthongs and song expressing ideas by nature of the things of experience, their material properties; and so gives evidence of how natural life and unmediated experience imprison the Negro through their idiom” (Judy 189).

Consequently, some whites believed that the language of black Africans was based on a system of thought that functions only at a superficial level, which is not capable of transmitting or emitting rational thought.

Couper argues that Fulani enables Salih’s capacity for original thought, which moves him away from the other Fulani speakers who seemed to “parrot” the master discourse to which they belonged in Africa and then on the American plantation. For Couper and Hodgson, speaking Fulani required a rich cognitive linguistic repertoire that displayed the rudimentary structure of a modern mind. There is a Kantian character to this belief that practical reason and language were instrumental toward eradicating ignorance and ultimately diminishing savagery. Couper suggests that Salih uses a type of linguistic deployment to separate himself from other blacks to prevent “acculturation.” This would mean that Salih is conscious of the various molds that the oppressing disciplinary system appropriates, and this movement establishes difference from other slaves. To Couper, he becomes a thinking example of Fulani culture who can “enter” into the linear conformity of western scientific study.

Couper then presents Salih’s biography in order to establish his qualifications to be a native informant. Salih Bilali, or “Old Tom,” was an African Muslim slave driver of the Hopeton Plantation, Georgia. Not much is known about his life. Salih Bilali was a Massina Fulani, born some time around 1765. Salih was a member neither of the

aristocracy nor of the clergy. Couper writes that “his father and mother, were persons of considerable property” (74). At some point in his youth, he received a rudimentary education that included learning to read in Arabic. Later in his teens, Bambara slavers seized him and held him at the Bambara capital of Segu where he spent much of the 1790s as a slave. However, he did not find a permanent home in captivity and ended up being sold to various owners. Salih eventually reached the Gulf of Guinea port of Anomabu in modern-day Ghana and then shipped off to the Bahamas. Unfortunately, there is not much information available about his stay in the Bahamas except that Couper purchased him there sometime in 1800. When Salih reached St. Simons Island, he found the stable home that had eluded him throughout his adult life and resigned himself to Hopeton Plantation.

Although he spent most of his life as a slave in a kingdom where animist religions were practiced, he did not abandon his faith. According to the narrative, Salih Bilali did not drink, fasted during Ramadan and preserved his ability to read Arabic. This dedication to the faith impressed his masters considerably, who considered him one of the most pious men they had ever met. In an interesting display of dedication and perseverance, Salih managed to pass down his traditions to his children, and even named

his son Bilali—who eventually became Couper’s butler.¹⁴ Not much else is known about the rest of Salih’s life—even the manner of his death is in question. According to James

¹⁴ According to Islamic tradition, Bilal Ibn Rabah (d. 642?) was an Ethiopian slave who was one the first converts to Islam; because of his beautiful voice, he became the first *muadhin* (the caller to prayer) during

Hamilton Couper, Salih Bilali died sometime in the late 1850s at the plantation where he cried on his deathbed, “Allah is God and Mohammad his prophet.” However, the wording of the letter is problematic. It is not exactly clear whether Couper is referring to Bilali Mohammed, another famous African Muslim on Sapelo Island with whom he had personal contact, or to Salih Bilali. Throughout his stay on the plantation, Salih earned some privileges from the family, and participated in slave purchases on the other side of the island. During one such visit, he disappeared and was presumed killed.

Couper describes how Salih had already reached an important position as a driver on the plantation because “his industry, intelligence, and honesty” brought him “into notice, and he was successively advanced, until he was made head driver” (68). Salih assumed the right to manage “four hundred and fifty negroes” and performed his duties diligently and “without a supervisor” (69). Couper explains that Salih “has a quickness of apprehension, a strong tenacious memory, and what is more rare in a slave, a faculty of forethought” (68). Making an indirect link to Ayuba, Couper suggests that Salih possesses “great veracity and honesty” (69). Couper categorizes Salih as a “strict Mohametan” who “abstains from spirituous liquors, and keeps the various fasts, particularly Rhamadan” (69). Consequently, this makes Salih “exempt from all feeling of superstition;” he “holds in great contempt, the African belief in fetishes and evil spirits.” The most significant aspect of this break from African blacks is literacy. Salih “reads Arabic, and has a Koran (which however, I have not seen) in that language, but does not write it” (69). Salih’s “exceptionality” requires ethnologists to pursue a track of

the time of the Prophet. The name is symbolically important in that Abu Bakr, one of the prophet’s earliest companions, freed Bilal. Therefore, for many African Muslims, the name connotes resistance.

speculative reason. This question of difference reveals the deceptive nature of constructing a fixed racial identity. A question arises here: how do Salih's contributions operate in terms of location where the possibilities to be nowhere and everywhere rest? In short, how does Couper intend to fix Salih's identity on the empty map of West Africa?

In terms of map-making ability, neither the informant nor ethnologists are operating from a very stable foundation. The center of the map is the town of Kianah. Unfortunately, this site has remained a historical problem for researchers. Ivor Wilks, who first edited the narrative, writes in a footnote: "I cannot identify Kianah. It must, however, have been near the confluence of the Niger and Bani, and a little west of the present town of Mopti" (Wilks 147). This makes the ethnologist rely upon a town whose existence could not be determined.

Another problem is that, considering the informant's age at the time of enslavement, he could not adequately have experienced much about the West African interior. He claims to have "never been at Tumbootu" (71). Salih was approximately seventy-three years old and had lived as a slave since the age of thirteen. This potentially makes the source information highly unreliable, even if there were western documents that could authenticate somewhat the geographical material being transmitted. Locations, names and topographies tend to be vaguely defined.

Moreover, Salih's ability to provide ethnological data is questionable simply because he had only a vague understanding of the Fulani's own origins in the region. Couper "infers" that the "town of Kianah, or perhaps the kingdom of Massinah, is a Foulah or Fellatah colony, established among the older nations of Soudan and differing

from them in language” (71). The Fulani origins had been documented as belonging to somewhere toward the coast of West Africa where they subsequently drifted eastward following their cattle in search of pasture land. Unfortunately, Salih “is not aware of any difference of origin” (71). Aside from that, Salih does not reveal much about the question of racial order except that many languages were spoken in the region and that only one race of Negroes occupied “the country of Tumbootu, Kounah, and Massina” (71).

Since Salih’s qualifications as a reliable informant are questionable, we must examine the transcription of the African place names to determine Couper’s accuracy. Couper fails to establish ethnological order to the map as he cannot settle upon any cogent system of fixed spelling. Couper is aware that a stable western orthography of West African locations is a problem: “You will perceive, that the proper names differ slightly from the received spelling; and that the vocabulary varies somewhat from those given to you, in the *Encyclopedia Americana*, and Pritchard in his *Physical Researches*” (69). This outlines the problems of penetrating West Africa because the linguistic landscape is constantly shifting and not producing any concrete points of contact.

Couper attempts to circumvent some of these problems by deferring to Hodgson’s authority, writing that “you will . . . readily identify the words as belonging to the Foulah and Fellatah language” (Hodgson 69). While Couper delegates the authority of interpretation to Hodgson, neither man possesses the expertise to make a formal translation of either “Foulah” or “Fellatah” into English—especially since “Foulah” and “Fellatah” are the same language.¹⁵ At stake here is the problem of manufacturing a set of

¹⁵ In another example, Couper shows how unprepared he is for the project when he claims that a few words, “such as child, differ from both [languages]” (Hodgson 69).

“constants from the variables, or of determining constant relations between variables” (D & G 101). It becomes a project that attempts to manipulate the heterogeneous nature of language into a homogenous system of order without succeeding.

In order to show how the failure to conform to one fixed spelling of African place names demonstrates Salih’s displacement, it is important to backtrack to the beginning of the narrative and examine some of the translation work that Ronald Judy has done in his important work on African Muslim slave narratives. Judy argues that the issue of illegibility and heterography are important components in the study of Afro-Arabic documents. Specifically, the misspellings of the cities, “Timbucto, Jenne, and Sego” are indicative of the larger problems of translating the Fulani “experience.” Couper spells “Jenne” (Hodgson 68) correctly, and then in another section writes, “Jennay” (70-74). He spells “Timbucto” once, and writes it five times as “Tumbootu” (71). Couper is only consistent with the spelling of Sego and Kianah. Yet, these misspellings are not only indicative of his status as an amateur philologist. The major problem occurs when Hodgson himself makes similar spelling errors in *Notes on Northern Africa*. As Judy writes, “he spells Couper’s ‘Timbucto’ twice as ‘Timbuctoo,’ then as ‘Tombutum,’ ‘Tenbokto,’ and ‘Tombuctu’ When citing from Leo Africanus he spells ‘Tombutu’ (61-62). Couper’s Jenne/Jennay occurs once as ‘Jenneh,’ and then as ‘Yenni’ . . .” (Judy 197).¹⁶ Judy shows that the problem of accurate and fixed transcription reveals the inability of western philological discourse to penetrate the opacity of the region. These

¹⁶ Judy points out that there were variant spellings for the city throughout the centuries, as seen in the early sixteenth century documents of Leo Africanus all the way through to Alexander Gordon Liang. Perhaps the only explorer to use the modern accepted spelling of “Timbuktu” was Henrich Barth. All of this became a problem by the time David Prescott Barrows addressed the issue in the introduction of his *Berbers and Blacks: Impressions of Morocco, Timbuktu, and Western Sudan* (1927).

misspellings also reveal the heterogeneous nature of African Muslim identity, which inevitably according to my reading produces a sense of displacement and the possibility for inadvertent forms of hybridity.

The issue of correct orthography has been important in American letters. American Enlightenment thinkers had been worried about the precarious nature of republics, already aware of their tendencies to fall and to turn into tyrannies. Noah Webster wanted to create a national language that would unify the new nation, and prevent this potential collapse, arguing that “our political harmony is therefore concerned in a uniformity of language.” Dialects, broken English, and other forms of immigrant English were as Jill Lepore suggests, “the linguistic equivalent of political factions, a kind local prejudice that could rend the Union apart” (29). Webster took the idea of language further by suggesting that the ability to spell a word properly meant knowing the subject, which represented a demonstration of reason. In such a framework, American language homogeneity could produce political homogeneity. Knowing the exact meaning of a word, and knowing its epistemological root, meant making a particular claim to knowledge about the world that offered a cornerstone to western thought. In terms of race and colonialism, it meant affixing a standard name on a subject and asserting a type of mastery. This is a concept that Deleuze would later develop when considering the issue of power and codification:

The unity of language is fundamentally political. There is no mother tongue, only a power takeover by a dominant language that at times advances along a broad front, and at times swoops down on diverse

centers simultaneously . . . the scientific enterprise of extracting constants and constant relations is always coupled with the political enterprise of imposing them on speakers and transmitting orders. (D & G 101)

Yet, what develops here is that Fulani displacement problematizes the linear appropriations of the majority or master language. The misspelling of words in Salih's narrative illustrates more than confusion about the way westerners attempted to overwrite Fulani identity. This type of heterography leads inadvertently to a kind of linguistic resistance that the western linguist, himself, encodes. Through misspelling, Salih's identity and geographical location slips out of conventional usage and becomes deterritorialized in the "event" of transcription and manages to form new subject positions and relations to new territories. In other words, he becomes defined by preconceived tropes and concepts that often unravel and become indefinable "states, states of language, ethnicity . . . with their own ghetto territories" (D & G 106).

What does this mean toward resolving the empty regions of the Hausa face that represents the emptiness of the European map? The face of the Hausa does not produce the map that explains West Africa. Instead the map becomes a porous concept determined by the speculative craft that had dominated European map-making for over two millennia and transforms into a complicated transcultural ethno-landscape.¹⁷ The map that the Hausa provides, the very concept of faciality, becomes a portal. As Deleuze and Guattari write, "the map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification" (12). The indeterminate face opens

¹⁷ See Alfred Hiatt's "Blank Spaces on the Earth."

broader ranges of study, brings in a heterogeneous assortment of languages and groups that defeats the notion of European discursive homogeneity.

Salih stands as an embodiment of that face, whose presence offers ethnologists the ability to make the double move to know both the “authentic” Hausa in Pritchard’s book and the validity of their ethnological methodology in an American plantation setting. The narrative reveals that Salih is an unreliable narrator because he cannot fill in the gaps for the western ethnologists and only reveals the limitations of their gaze at the image. He does not vocalize an alternative discourse because the narrative is bound by a monological discourse that effectively silences him. Nevertheless, we can argue that his corporeal presence invites Couper and Hodgson to decipher the correct spelling of African place names, and then to attempt to assert their linguistic mastery over the transcription of place names. A basic claim is that this leads to misdirection because Hodgson and Couper cannot master by constants.

What emerges is that names are misspelled and shift along the banks of the Niger River. The heterography challenges the cognitive autonomy of the colonists’ gaze. Simply put, by being unable to spell correctly African place names, Couper and Hodgson must negotiate the very illusions, distortions, and misappropriations of ethnological discourse. In their attempt to create a homogenous etymology, Hodgson and Couper do not note that Timbuktu was the ancient heart of the Mande and then Songhai Empires—not a Fulani city. At heart, there lies an element of inaccuracy and misunderstanding of Africa. Another problem is that their living source of that knowledge is sixty years removed from his ancestral homes and becomes an indeterminate hybrid subject without

an accessible history or fixed source of origins. Ultimately, a type of displacement arises. We can read here that the ethnologist seeks to translate a picture of a Hausa and inevitably encodes his own fantasies when he cannot make the shifting and fluid landscape into a product of western hegemony. Much of this narrative ends up setting up the problems of ethnology that Lamena Kebe experiences. Fortunately, Kebe will be able to provide a direct African response to his ethnologist.

Lamena Kebe: Ethnological Transcriptions of the Jakhanke

Lamena Kebe agreed to be interviewed by Theodore Dwight, Jr., in 1835. By this point, Kebe had gained his freedom and been employed by the American Colonization Society as a fundraiser for the Liberian colony. He performed this task admirably and seemed legitimately interested in telling his story to a sympathetic American public. It is unfortunate that while he managed to solicit a fair amount of interest in his story and raised enough funds to return home, he did not become as much of a popular name as Abd ar-Rahman or Umar ibn Said. He first gave an abbreviated version of his story to Reverend Breckenridge in 1834, which appeared in the *African Repository*. Theodore Dwight, Jr., read the article and then sought out Kebe to gain more information about African ethnology.

Dwight is an unusual figure among antebellum slave narrative editors. Trained initially in classical literature at Yale University, his research evolved to incorporate the new discipline of ethno-philology. How African Muslims captured his imagination is

difficult to guess.¹⁸ A basic premise of his research was to show how these “exceptional” subjects could potentially benefit western science and missionary activity. He wrote two works on the subject: a four-page account called “On the Sereculeh Nation in Nigritia: Remarks on the Sereculehs, an African Nation, Accompanied by a Vocabulary of Their Language” (1835); and a later article called “Condition and Character of Negroes of Africa” (1864).

“On the Sereculeh Nations” is a short piece organized roughly into seven parts. In the first two sections, Dwight establishes his ethnological methodology, authenticates Kebe’s identity and presents a brief biography. Dwight then challenges the assertions that Conrad Brun and Adrian Balbi make about African linguistic worth by presenting Kebe’s teaching pedagogy. He briefly discusses the concept of “doubling,” which is an African pedagogical tool that enables students to listen in one particular language and to think, reason and transcribe in another. Then he ends the narrative with a list of Sereculeh vocabulary and a bibliography of teaching materials. As an important side note, some parts of the interview were not published in 1835 and went unread for years until Dwight published “Condition and Character of Negroes of Africa.” This longer piece gathered many interviews he had done with African Muslim slaves into one essential work. Of particular importance to this chapter is the section where Dwight elaborates on his interview with Kebe. Since both articles draw from the same source materials, this chapter will cite from both works to explore the important problems of translation that

¹⁸ Dwight is known for his book, *The Kansas War* (1859), which was a Free-Soiler’s description of the attempt to push slavery into the Kansas-Missouri territories:

Kebe experienced. First, it is useful to explore how Dwight appropriates Kebe's identity, teaching pedagogy and literacy, and then to consider Kebe's complex response.

"On the Sereculeh Nation in Nigritia" starts with Dwight proposing an interdisciplinary approach: "it is understood to be the object of the Society, from the recent plan of organizing various departments, to embrace a wide scope in the horizon of knowledge; and therefore no apology, perhaps, need be made for introducing a communication on philology" (*AMAA* 415). Philology was a relatively new discipline that had been gaining credibility as a way to uncover complicated and mostly forgotten interconnections between ethnic groups. Dwight felt that this approach offered the most promising avenue to understand the Sereculeh. His proposal was simple: researchers should transcribe the vocabulary of the Sereculeh to construct a proper linguistic map of West Africa. This type of fieldwork was not something especially new, considering that the American Lyceum had already "published the valuable essay of Dr. James, on the Chippewa language" (415). All that was needed was a stable etymology provided by an ideal native informant.

Kebe or "old Paul" brought impressive credentials to the American Lyceum. He was born around 1780, near the town of Kaba on the Joliba River in Futa Jallon. His father was a Sereculeh, whose ancestors had been the traditional founders of Ancient Ghana, and his mother was a Mande ("Manenca" according to Dwight). Kebe received an education in Islamic philosophy and religious instruction in the Jakhanken cities of "Kebbe, or Kibby and Bundu, where he spent many years in studying under different masters" (426). After a period "pursuing a long course of preparatory studies," influenced

by an “an aunt who was much more learned than himself” (426), Kebe became a schoolmaster in Futa Jallon “for some years . . . in Nigritia” (414), and had “acquired any considerable knowledge of things around” (415).

Unknowingly, Dwight had stumbled across an informant who could shed light on many aspects of West African culture. When Kebe mentions the Jakhanke cities of learning, he reveals his affiliation to a group of West African scholars known for advocating pacifism and Sufism.¹⁹ In a revealing section, Kebe provides a history of this group:

[the Sereculeh] were formerly a nation of ignorant idolaters, dwelling northward from Foota Jallo (their capital being Diafun, or Jafunu), but a few generations past converted to Mohammedanism by their prince, Moral Kebe, who abdicated his throne and took to study, in the city of Jaga, and afterwards introduced the religion of the prophet and learning among his people. The traditions obtained from Lamén constantly present the progress of Islamism and education in Nigritia. The Sereculeh people, sometime after this, were driven from their capital, Diaga, or Jaga, by the plague of locust, and a portion of them entering Foota Jalloo, conquered the eastern half of that kingdom, which they have ever since held. (“On the Sereculeh Nation in Nigritia” 452)

¹⁹ Another factor that suggests that Kebe is a Jakhanke is that he mentions the *qabila* leader Moral Kebe. In an overview of contemporary sources, Sanneh, Austin and Judy validate Kebe’s claims that Moral Kebe was the originator of the clan or *qabila*. The important Jakhanke texts called *Ta’rikh al-Hajj Suware* and *Karamokho-Ba* show that the Kabba clan entered the community of Jakhanke at Diakha-Bambukhu that al-Hajj Salim created. They resided there until the start of the sixteenth century when Fulani incursions into the region caused the Jakhanke to abandon the city and flee to Bundu. Subsequently, the Kabba’s played an important role in the founding of the three important learning centers: Bani Isra’ila, Qayrawan, and Gunjur.

In *The Jakhanke Muslim Clerics*, Lamin Sanneh explains that the Jakhanke are a caste of Muslim clerics and educators, now mostly Mande speaking, who originated out of Dia in Masina (now in the modern Republic of Mali). Their name is attached to the missionary activities of al-Hajj Salim Suware, who helped spread Islam around 1200. Originally situated in Masina, the Jakhanke followed al-Hajj Salim to Diakha-Bambukhu on the River Bafing. Over time, their teachings spread throughout Senegambia. Sanneh explains that their pedagogy carried “a strong commitment to the peaceful dissemination of Islam. Their significance in the Islamization of much of pre-colonial West Africa is without parallel, and the Islamic educational system as it developed was largely their creation” (2)

Matters related to his slavery and passage to the United States are murky. It seems that his editors did not want to address the sensitive issue of slavery and potentially problematize the efforts of the American Colonization Society. So there are many details missing about his experiences on the Middle Passage, arrival in the United States, and the name(s) of his owner(s). At some point, Kebe converted to Christianity. As Breckenridge explains, “After being for so long a period a slave, he had at last met a Christian Master who set him free, and sent him to ask assistance from the Colonization Society, to enable him to return to Africa” (410). Since Kebe resisted acculturating into plantation culture thanks to his “intellectual sophistication,” he could address the “the erroneous impressions which prevail in the civilized world respecting the condition of the Negro race in Africa . . . ” (421). In this light, Kebe’s pedagogy and bibliography becomes a “stable” foundation for ethnological work.

Much to his credit, Dwight delves deeper into West African “manuscripts” than any American ethnologist up to that point. He outlines a variety of courses and disciplines that al-Hajj Salim had considered important toward the dissemination of knowledge throughout Africa. The texts include studies on various types of Islamic science: the science of man, hadith studies, linguistics, rhetoric, jurisprudence, ideology and Sufism (Judy 172). Dwight also lists toward the end of the narrative the texts that comprised Kebe’s library: “*Náhayi, Fákihu, Sáni, Láuan, Taurát* (The Torah or law of Moses), *Yabúry*, and *Alsára, Ankidutilmámy, Ségudin, Bunámara-kubrá, Bunámara-wussitá, Bunámara-fúsilum, Sulaimy-kubrá, Sánisy-kubrá, Sánisy-wusitá, Sánisy-sugurá, Sánisi-sukú, Aluwatriét, Bonomahha-jábbu, Almahháma* and *Talakiny*” (420).

Using this sample of Jakhanken literary materials, Dwight attempts to change common western misperceptions about the Sereculeh. Adrian Balbi in “Atlas Ethnographique” (1826) relegates the Sereculeh to “a body of traveling merchants . . . who speak a language ‘abound[ing] in gutturals and very difficult to learn’” (415). Dwight argues that the Sereculeh language is “agreeable, sonorous and easy to the organs of the speech” and is not “so barbarous a tongue as has been supposed” (416). This suggests that westerners could learn and speak this language. Such evidence helps to unseat Conrad Malte Brun’s canonical work on African ethnology, *Precis de la Geographie Universelle*, (1829) which makes the claim that there was not such a “thing as higher education among the Mahomedan negroes” (416). Dwight points out that Kebe’s “thirty books” verify the legitimacy of West African learning (416). Dwight

seems impressed by the fact that the texts are translations of earlier Arabic works into the Sereculeh language.

According to Dwight, these texts “form a complete course of Nigritian education, which is, of course, defective in many material points, but yet worthy of attention on various accounts, and, so far as the writer is able to ascertain, as yet unknown to the learned of Europe” (416). Their presence establishes that Kebe’s students learn the basics of critical thought and are not simply mimicking an authoritative oral discourse. Through presenting the West African educational system, Dwight shows that the Sereculeh language is conducive toward the transmission of knowledge. Dwight summarizes his approach:

Want of space in these pages must necessarily limit our remarks to very narrow bounds, and we shall therefore be unable to present many details which would interest the reader, and can give only a few relating to Mohammedan learning, its nature, institutions, and results. This forms an essential part of the Moslem system, and has long been in operation on large families of the Negro race . . . Unlike popery, it favors, nay, requires, as a fundamental principle, the free and universal reading and study of their sacred book; and, instead of withholding it from the people under penalties of death and perdition, it establishes schools for class, primarily to teach its languages and doctrines As this has always been the practice, it may not seem that learning flourished among the Moors, in Spain, during the Dark Ages of Europe, while Popery so long

overshadowed the nations with her worse than Egyptian darkness. Readers who have neglected Africa may not be prepared to believe that schools of different grades have existed for centuries in various interior negro counties, and under the provisions of law, in which even the poor are educated at the public expense, and in which the deserving are carried on many years through long courses of regular instruction. Nor is this system always confined to the Arabic language, or to the works of Arabian writers. A number of native languages have been reduced to writing, books have been written in them. Schools also have been kept in which native languages are taught. Indeed, one of the most gratifying evidences has thus been furnished of the favorable influences exerted by the unrestricted use, as well as the general diffusion of the knowledge of letters (422)

Afterwards, Dwight relates how Kebe criticizes western education and then explores the issue of doubling before presenting a short list of Sereculeh words. In terms of methodology, Dwight transcribes Kebe's oral communication and then creates a master list. He intends to compare that list to other sketches of the Sereculeh language in order to construct a dictionary of Sereculeh words and meanings. The key is to reach some type of orthographic conformity and in the process to overwrite the culture in terms of western codes. Dwight's method relies heavily upon, to borrow a quote from Bhabha, "a vigorous demand for narrative" (140). What this means is that the ethnologist attempts to construct a monological, linear depiction of source cultures that subscribes to known

conventions and discourses of West Africa. The pedagogy and bibliography only validate the authenticity of the project. Consequently, this material enables him to build a foundation for the science of ethnology to enable the labeling and the taxonomization of West African identity into a concept of discursive homogeneity.

Kebe: Making Dwight into a Seeker of Knowledge

While Dwight's voice is generally heard in the narrative, there are instances where Kebe in his incomplete English receives the opportunity to communicate directly to his audience. Although the text is missing many direct quotations, and even those that managed to survive the editorial process were relegated to the historical trash pile for years until Dwight collected some of his notes, I claim that Kebe does much to show a sophisticated undertaking of the task. In his reading of Gayatri Spivak's famous essay, "Can the Subaltern speak?," Arnold Krupat mentions that when it comes to marginal figures the question is not "whether the subaltern can speak but whether and to what effect she can be heard" (19). We are left fragments and excerpts from which to construct an ethnological profile. Dwight overwrites Kebe's voice in the early address to the American Lyceum. Fortunately, in the second piece, there is enough material, with direct quotes from Kebe, to garner a revealing look into his attitudes about western education and double voiced criticism of Dwight's methodology.

In "Condition and Character of Negroes of Africa," Kebe urges Dwight to "write down what I tell you exactly as I say it" and to "be careful to distinguish between what I have seen and what I have only heard other people say of" ("Condition and Character"

428). Kebe recognizes that African subjectivity contended with popular images that lay somewhere between reason and imagination in the western mind. As a knowledgeable informant, he claims that many westerners “may have made some mistakes” about Africa and implores Dwight to “put down exactly what I say, by and by, when good men go to Africa, they will say; *Paul told the truth*” (“Condition and Character” 428). There are various epistemological systems at play in this interview. It becomes apparent that the narrative opens an insight that westerners should not impose their own conditions of study, but strive to communicate an accurate message that considers perspectives from alternative sources.

The word “truth” is ambiguous within Kebe’s double articulation. In this case, “truth” means not only to be a service for those who want to learn, but it also means the subtle voiced manipulation of imperial ideologies. It is important to recognize that Kebe does not reflect what Bhabha considers the “colonizer’s narrative demand” (141). Kebe’s response manipulates the calculations of the ethnologists. This is where we can read the small differences, alterations and displacements in his response. When Kebe declares, “Paul told the *truth*,” he sets the stage not only to articulate a type of pedagogy that will attempt to show westerners new modes of thinking, but also to emphasize the active agency of his own identity.

Kebe attempts to relate an accurate image of West African pedagogy. This means presenting what Judy considers elements of the *ilm-ul-kalam* (Qur’anic discourse), but more importantly elements of the Sufi tradition of the *tawhid* that provides the Jakhanken

system its epistemological foundation.²⁰ Sufism becomes a creative mode of resistance that places Kebe inside the in-between spaces of this encounter. There is a sly civility about Kebe's reaction to Dwight. He is willing to transmit meaning, but it does not directly affirm Dwight's own monological perspective. He cannot become the mirror to the ethnologists. Answers are not direct, but expressed through examples and anecdotes. Even the crucial part about Jakhanken philology is not transmitted in a linear manner that lends itself to easy dissemination; instead, it is transmitted as part of a pedagogical exercise that enables Dwight to "experience" Africa.

The Sufi notion of the *tawhid* is an Islamic theological principle that generally means the "unity of being" (*wahdat alwujud*). Important Sufi thinkers like Ibn Arabi developed the theory that all being is one, and that the purpose of human life is to discover the principle of *tawhid* as a direct personal experience of our relation to the absolute, and to the preservation of harmony with the universe. Human consciousness is both analytic and intuitive, a concept that enables the being to see the individual as well as the whole. Sufism thus rejects the vision of human "autonomy" and the epistemologies as imagined by western positivist discourse. It stresses instead cultural pluralism that is linked to the fundamental interconnectedness of all human beings. Through the notion of the ninety-nine attributes of Allah's name as representing the "One," this encourages recognition of a polyphony of voices, perspectives, and relations.²¹

²⁰ Unfortunately, Judy does not consider elements of *tawhid* in his deconstruction of the African American literary tradition. Considering the importance of this concept within Sufi thought, this is a curious omission.

²¹ The "One" is a complex aspect of the philosophy of Ibn Arabi. Please refer to *The Meccan Revelations* and to Henry Corbin's *Alone with the Alone*.

Kebe understands that the deployment of the *tawhid* is a difficult undertaking that would be probably ignored because it represented the very antithesis of western style critical thinking. A key premise of Sufi education is that most people do not want to learn. As Idries Shah suggests, “contrary to appearance, they tend to engage in activities which they use as a substitute for learning. These activities they call ‘studies’” (194). Nonetheless, Kebe criticizes the ontological moorings of the American system by exploring the “type” of student produced here. He resorts to an established teaching method known as the Diagrammatic of Impression Tale, which is a Sufi story. As Shah writes, “Sufi stories, though they may seem on the surface to purvey a moral, or appear intended to entertain, are not literary forms . . . they are literature incidentally, but teaching materials primarily” (197).

Kebe first focuses on the western student’s lack of discipline. According to his observations of American students, he claims “that children should not be allowed to change school. In our country, no such thing is known or permitted, except when absolutely necessary” (417). Kebe reveals that within the Sufi tradition of teaching, such movement would have been considered undesirable and potentially a factor in the student’s alienation from his path, which only the master could determine for him. Furthermore, Kebe does not approve of western discipline: “when a boy has been punished, or for any other reason dislikes his teacher, you let him run all about to this school and that, and he learns nothing, and is good for nothing” (418).

This is not the wording of a stern disciplinarian, but of a person concerned with helping a student to become a seeker of knowledge. Kebe clearly has in mind the

tradition of Islamic sciences that includes the Qur'an, the various hadith traditions, and many of the later commentaries from the various schools and philosophies of Islam. In particular, surah Yunus 3-7 in the Qur'an summarizes the Islamic sciences and it is worth reproducing here:

Verily, your lord is Allah, who created the heavens and the earth in six periods then he settled Himself firmly on the Throne, He governs everything. There is no intercessor with Him save after His permission. This is Allah, your Lord, so worship Him. Will you not then mind? To Him shall you all return. The promise of Allah is true. Surely, He originates the creation, then He produces it, that He may reward those, who believe, and do good works, with equity; and as for those who disbelieve, they shall have boiling water to drink and a painful punishment, because they disbelieve. He it is who made the sun radiate a brilliant light and the moon reflect a lustre, and ordained for it proper stages, that you might know the count of years and the reckoning of time. Allah has not created this system but in accordance with the requirements of truth. He details the Signs for a people who possess knowledge.

Verily, in the alternation of night and day, and in all that Allah has created in the heavens and the earth there are Signs for a God fearing people.

Without discipline, the student does not gain the desire to understand the complex voices and traditions within the Islamic discourse; instead, he or she develops an

incomplete or fractured knowledge that will thwart his or her ability to gain the necessary dialogical or maieutic perspective. As Reza Shah-Kazemi explains concerning traditional Sufi hermeneutics: “religion is divine dis-closure, not human ‘closure’, openings to higher truths and deeper realities, not simply exclusive affirmations of simple dogmas combined with perceptions limited to surface phenomena” (8). For the Sufi, there is a desire to dismiss the relativity of forms and to challenge the boundaries of reason and language—in effect presenting their limitations. It is important to combine different modes of thinking in new and creative ways in order to break or at the very least reveal the limitations of linear critical thought. Once this is accomplished, as dictated by traditional Sufi training, then the student is capable of new modes of analysis and perception.

The story of student discipline becomes an example of “conduct-teaching” that shows each master must adapt to each student. According to Shah, such an approach “cannot be a mechanical thing, applied to all people exactly the same way” (283). Kebe employs a cooperative approach to help Dwight understand African education further. Like a well-disciplined Sufi, Kebe does not overextend his teachings. Instead, he advocates a type of dialogical perspective that avoids an oppositional model that Fanon would call later “Manichean” allegories. In many ways, Kebe wants to help Dwight become a better learner.

Therefore, he deploys the practice known as “doubling” in order to present the basics of his pedagogy. According Ron Eglash, “the presence of doubling as a cultural theme occurs in many different African societies and in many different social domains,

connecting the sacredness of twins, spirit doubles and double vision with material objects . . .” (89). Judy explains further: “doubling appears to have been a form of bilingual education where the student not only was given the Arabic word to memorize, or even just a translation of it into his native tongue, but was given its meaning” (174). Although Qur’anic Arabic was the center of study, students did not necessarily “learn” Arabic, rather they learned the discourse of rudimentary exposition where “the meaning of the Arabic is explained as well as translated” (AMAA 418).

The question of “meaning” becomes problematic in this case. Judy argues that “meaning” translates into “ma’na,” which is a term used in Qur’anic discourse: “it does not refer to what the signifier conveys, its signified, as it were; instead, it refers to how it conveys, the codes which govern referentiality” (174). If this is accurate then Kebe employs doubling as if he was instructing one of his students. He provides Sereculeh and Arabic source words without any translation and relies upon Dwight to understand the base words and then to write them out in English and compare them to other lists.

In examining the word-list, there are many errors. First, Dwight claims thirty books belong in the library when he only lists twenty-one items. Then in considering the titles, there are many mistranslations.²² According to Judy, *Nahāyi* appears to refer to a text written by al-Mubarak ibn Muhammad ibn al-Athar called *an-Nīhāya fī gharīb al-hadīth wa al-athar*. However, Austin suggests that the term means nahw or grammar.

²² Unfortunately, linguists have not determined an accurate translation of Kebe’s bibliography. Judy and Austin have competing versions of the list. Judy based his translation research on two important bibliographies produced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: *Inventaire de la bibliothèque ‘Umarienne de Sègu* and Abdullah ibn Fodio’s manuscript *‘Ida’ an-nusukh man akhadhtu ‘anhu min ash-Shuyukh*. Austin relies on traditional western sources, especially Jack Goody’s famous “Literacy in Traditional Societies.”

Fákihu is an indeterminate word. Judy claims it might mean *fiqh* or jurisprudence. *Sáni* means sunna, which means prophetic tradition—the more common or better understood term is *‘ilm-ul-hadīth*. According to Austin, *Láuan* means *lughā* or Arabic language and *Taurát* is Tauhid or theology. However, these are just subjects, and not book titles. Judy shows that the remaining seventeen “titles” are parts of longer works. *Alsára* is either part of *ibn Hisham’s Sira Nabawīya* (The Biography of the Prophet) as Judy contends (Judy 171), or *ar-Risāla* by *ibn Zaid* as Austin suggests (Austin 122). The three *Sánisy* books belong to Muhammad *ibn Yusuf as-Sanūssi’s* commentary, *‘Aqiday sughra as-sughra* (Ideology of the Small of the Smallest) (Judy 171). *Yabúry* refers to a single author instead of a long text. Dwight probably meant to refer to the name Muhammad *ibn Muhammad al-Ya’mui*. The strangest of all on the list are the *Bunámara* texts, which seems to belong to a multi-volume or manuscript work by an unknown author.

Predictability, Dwight cannot successfully transcribe the sounds to match the lists of Sereculeh words that already circulated at the American Ethnological Society. Dwight admits that the conditions behind the interview had been problematic: “it is possible that a few words may be Arabic, through misapprehension on my part, as Lamena often mentioned names of things in two languages” (418). Dwight’s failure to accurately translate the word-list is consistent with many Sufi strategies that attempt to show students the fluid nature of language and words. Citing an old Sufi proverb, Leonardo Arena writes, “words are confined to the shore,” which means that the “ocean of understanding is, decidedly, elsewhere.”²³ What is apparent is that the etymological list—

²³ See Leonardo Arena, *Il Sufismo (Sufism)*, Milan, Mondadori 1996.

which is the basis of the western “book”—reveals the ambivalent nature of such exchanges and shows the holes within imperial discourse.

Dwight cannot read this subtle act of resistance. Clearly, there is a chasm here where Dwight fails to grasp the concepts that Kebe aims to convey through this pedagogical performance. Instead, he presents his findings on the Sereculeh to the American Lyceum and, as Judy explains, “circulates the lists as though designation was definitive, and strives to discover in them objective validation for this ethnology” (186). At stake for Dwight is the notion of discursive homogeneity in the construction of Africa. Many members of the AES shared such an opinion about Africa, which in turn established the notion as a foundation of African ethnological research.

The word list, however, becomes a symbol of native or slave resistance to the hegemonic practice of ethnology. What results is a type of heterography that casts the Sereculeh language outside the boundaries of standard American orthography. Without a stable language to pin and code it, the fluid “native” is positioned in displaced transcultural zone from which he manipulates in subtle ways the power dynamic. In some ways, the native becomes a source of anxiety that challenges the epistemological foundations of how westerners construct African subjectivity. In other ways, perhaps more crucial to this project is the sense that Kebe’s sly civility produces a mode of misdirection that enables him to occupy a hybrid trajectory from where he can show the multidimensional aspects and dynamic power-relations within the ethnological encounter.

An argument can be made that Kebe manipulates the ethnological encounter to present a type of double articulation strategy. He shows that the universe, human nature,

and even the basics of positionality are not fully accessible to positivist science and that the native or slave will find ways to resist the imperial encounter and use a type of hybridity to influence such discourses. First, Kebe expounds the basic Sufi doctrine that considers knowledge as transformation and presents Dwight with an enigma. As Shah writes, “to learn something, you may have often to be exposed to it many times, perhaps from different perspectives” (165). Specifically, Kebe’s encounter with western ethnology illustrates the fact that translators and ethnologists attempt to match sentences, words, and meaning in the abstract, but they either ignore or do not understand what Asad argues as the concept of “*learning to live another form of life and to speak another kind of language*” (Asad 149).

Using his Sufi practices, Kebe disrupts and shifts slightly the power balance in the ethnological encounter. Through the practice of doubling, Kebe does not “transmit” a straight answer, but employs a type of ambivalent language that becomes an unexpected form of linguistic resistance and alternative mode of communication to produce new modes of understanding in the transcultural zone between West Africa and America. Unfortunately, this mode of understanding produces a type of confusion and misdirection for the ethnologist whose methodology does not take into account the hybridity of the “other.” Toward the end of the narrative, Dwight explains that after he “received from Lamena Kebe, orally . . .” (420) a list of Sereculeh words, he mentions that the books were “studied in the College of Bunder during regular course of six years” (420). The problem is that the University of Bunder does not even exist. Ultimately, this minor blunder makes us recognize the unstable ground upon which early nineteenth century

ethnologists tread when attempting to document an authentic experience of West Africa through the source words of “privileged informants.”

The question of legibility, positionality, and sly civility brings into light a multifaceted reality that broadens the scope of Afro-Arabic documents. I argue that the information that Lamena Kebe and Salih Bilali present reveals the unstable ground that the west continued to experience when studying West Africa. In the next chapter, I develop further these theories of language and displacement that Salih and Kebe foreground and consider different discursive strategies that appear in the narratives by Bilali Mohammed and Omar ibn Said. Specifically, I show that they use opacity, detours and Deleuzian “refrains” to document their American displacement.

Chapter 3: African Muslim Opacity: Exploring the Unintelligible in the Narratives of Omar ibn Said and Bilali Mohammed

William L. Andrews suggests that the period between 1810 and 1845 marked a new mode of experimentation in the slave narrative genre. Typically, slaves wrote for two reasons: they produced contemplative reflection of Christianity and of the past; and they wrote to profess the “truth” of slavery. I would like to make a minor intervention here. African Muslims provided a third innovation of the form: they sought to address a future generation of Muslims and to establish the boundaries of the *um’ma* or Islamic community. By this time, the Middle Passage had essentially been shut down, making African born slaves—especially Muslims—a relatively rare phenomenon. While slaves continued to reach other parts of the Atlantic until the 1880s, the American involvement with this activity had dwindled significantly and American plantation owners relied upon native-born slaves. This does not mean that “African” identity disappeared by any stretch of the imagination; instead, it evolved to cope with the realities of the western hemisphere and formed syncretic relationships with other epistemologies and identities. In response to this reality, Omar ibn Said and Bilali Mohammad construct a “minor literature” that anticipates and produces a future, as Deleuze would consider, for a Muslim audience “yet-to-come.” They are pioneers in a land of “chaos” and construct particular kinds of slave narratives that mark out new territories of the Islamic *dar-al-salam* or House of God. This chapter shows that Bilali and Omar produce inventive forms of the slave narrative that develop an experimental form of expression based on notions of opacity, detours, and Deleuzian refrains that transform American spaces and open new trajectories for Islamic subjects.

Bilali and Omar do not use concrete language and forms. They were not competent enough writers for that. Instead these writers blend and appropriate various Qur'anic passages, rely upon "refrains" and use a creolized form of Arabic as they write their subjectivities. To borrow a concept from Deleuze and Guattari, these texts flow across the boundaries of stratified space and construct a reminder of the irreducibility of existence and experience.²⁴ In other words, these texts do not "produce" meaning using conventional tropes of the genre. Instead, a type of obscurity appears here that has much to do with Glissant's notion of "opacity." The narratives by Omar and Bilali develop, to borrow a concept from Glissant, a "dialogue with the West" that expose the error of a western universal discourse and moves "toward entanglement" in participatory diversity (PR 191). In other words, as Alex Weheliye describes the construction and deployment of subjectivity under these conditions:

Therefore, a subject can be thought as a singular becoming-opacity, a crystallization that amalgamates in a particular spatiotemporal juncture, an agent (human or otherwise) with some form of noncalcified structure, in which neither structure nor agent dominate but might be said to create a temporary contingent arrangement that does not wield the hubris of intelligibility. (68)

These narratives do not produce a concrete experience of slavery that depicts a stable African American identity. Instead, these narrators construct complex narratives that depict various becomings, often centered on the fragments of the Qur'an they cite. As a result, two types of disjunctures occur: detours and Deleuzian refrains.

²⁴ See Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* on the notion of stratification.

Britton defines a detour as follows: “it is essentially an indirect mode of resistance that ‘gets around’ obstacles rather than confronting them head on, and it arises as a response to a situation of disguised rather than overt oppression and struggle” (25). The concept of the detour is provocative because slave narratives rely upon, to quote Butterfield, the use of “description, detail, and concrete language” to convey “the author’s political role” (72). In this regard, slave narrative rhetoric “is largely a function of the writer’s involvement in abolitionist politics” (72). However, these African Muslims did not subscribe to any anti-slavery political discourses where meaning needs to be obvious. Detours function through “ruse” or misdirection. As Glissant reminds us, detours are not completely coded in clear speech. They are marked by insertions of sounds and rhythms, alternative symbolic discourse and sometimes “simplistic” abstract concepts. They use “detours” because they cannot confront and fight the oppressing language or culture; for this reason, a detour marks a subject’s alienation from anything more “active.”

As they divert attention, Omar and Bilali rely upon “refrains” or excerpts of Qur’anic verse to inscribe their sense of self and place. In this case, the Deleuzian notion of the “refrain” is an important aspect of “opacity” as well. For these African Muslims, the excerpts of the Qur’an that they reproduce create an Islamic home. A “refrain” is a line or passage that is often repeated. Deleuze reminds us that the refrain performs three functions. Ian Buchanan offers the following summary:

It comforts us by providing a rough sketch of a calming and stabilising, calm and stable, centre in the heart of chaos. It is the song the lost child, scared of the dark, sings to find his or her way home. The tune also creates

the very home we return to when our foray into the world grows wearisome. Home is the product of a very particular gesture: one must draw a circle around that uncertain and fragile centre one is accustomed to calling home in order to delimit it.

The refrain produces a home when one might not be available. According to Deleuze, the refrain resists chaos and is always “in danger of breaking apart at any moment.” Since home is tenuous, there is a constant need for repetition. The force of repetition, through the reciting of the Qur’anic passages, reconfigures the southern map as rhizomatic, and moves the region away from the molar bands of traditional signification.

These opaque narratives create a discourse based upon various modes of expression, and communication that respond to oppression, inequality, and cultural repression; however, the narratives cannot reverse the power inequity. This chapter argues that the *Biography of Omar ibn Said* (1831) by Omar ibn Said manipulates various modes of creolized Arabic and the Qur’an to transform slightly the prevailing structures, hierarchies and concepts of the slave narrative. This discursive act preserves his pre-slavery mode of inquiry, communication and expression and initiates an inventive hybrid discourse of engagement. At stake is the appropriation of the western literary form and its alteration in order to create a dialogue of entanglement that resists the practices of domination and subordination of traditional slavery discourses and presents a new expression of African Muslim identity. Said’s efforts foreground the much more sophisticated strategies of *Diary of Ben Ali* by Bilali Muhammad. I argue that the document reveals novel ways of resisting western codification where heterography, alternative spellings, and refrains of Qur’anic passages create a tapestry where the reader,

to borrow a quote from Glissant, “must focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components.” My claim here is that *The Diary* represents an affirmation of place in the Sapelo Islands that does not consider the ambivalence of a return to Africa; instead, it negotiates the boundaries of amalgamation and places a stake in a landscape that had been traditionally hostile to Islam.

Omar ibn Said: Opaque Detours

The Biography of Omar ibn Said is a confusing text with many instances of indirect language that hide and manipulate meaning. Nevertheless, this opacity offers the potential for new readings and creative responses to western modernity. Often, it is not a direct route, but one with many detours. As Glissant writes, in the characteristics of the detour “we . . . consciously face our ambiguities and fix ourselves firmly in the uncertain possibilities of the word made ours” (CD 168). Not only does this narrative move away from slave narrative convention, making a traditional reading of the narrative extremely difficult, but it also forces us to address questions of identity and location that are akin to later post-colonial discourses. Omar develops a hybrid voice that intervenes in the discourses of American slavery and in the process constructs an expressive Islamic displaced space, through detours and Qur’anic refrains, that force us to ask important questions about the interconnection between “home” and “identity” for a Muslim living during the antebellum period.

The autobiography has a long, rich history, with an especially complicated translation history. Initially, Omar produced the document sometime in 1831.

Afterwards, the autobiography fell into the possession of various whites in the south, often showcased as an example of southern cultural heritage. Sometime in the 1920s, the “original” autobiography disappeared completely and only the original translation remained. In 1995, researchers discovered the original manuscript lying forgotten in an old trunk. Cognizant of the nature of the discovery, they called Austin Allan to authenticate the document. Soon after, the owners placed the document for sale at auction. Eventually, Derrick Beard, a collector of African American heritage, purchased the document. Fortunately, he did not lock up the document in a private vault and has allowed researchers access. Several years later, Ala A. Alryyes produced a new translation that painted a complex picture of Omar’s life in America. Osman and Forbes then conducted the first important research on the document by comparing the old and new translation and determining that Omar’s conversion had been nominal.

This work is especially important because Omar has been the subject of legends. From the period of 1807-1837, Omar’s story was quite similar to many African Muslims already discussed at length. He was literate; he managed to challenge normative racial boundaries; and he used Arabic not only to write himself into a privileged position on the plantation, but ultimately into the cultural imagination of the American south. Members of the American Colonization Society, such as Ralph R. Gurley and Francis Scott Key, wanted to use Omar as a potential missionary. While Omar seemed interested at first, he declined their invitation, and chose to stay in the United States. He converted to Christianity and became a minor celebrity who enjoyed a relatively comfortable lifestyle in his old age. There were many, however, who doubted his conversion, such as Reverend Matthew B Grier, who attended his church regularly and eventually wrote an

important piece on him, “Uncle Moreau” (1859). Nonetheless, the allure of his story overrode any concerns about his true faith, and his legendary story became an interesting aspect of the American slave experience.

Subsequently, writers started to assert their own interpretations of Omar. In 1847, an article in a Wilmington, North Carolina newspaper described the slave as a noble Arabian scholar with fine, delicate physical features. David Brown’s *The Planter* constructed Omar or “Uncle Moreu” into a Moor. In 1884, in an article called, “Prince Omeroh: Romantic Experience of a Princely Slave—A Strange Story of the Old Plantation Days,” the anonymous author described Omar as a slave trading Arab who was enslaved near the Congo River. Articles like “Meroh—A Slave” (1887) written by an anonymous author from North Carolina, “Prince of Arabia” (1927) by Louis T. Moore, and “The Story of Prince Omeroh” (1934) by Calvin Leonard kept the myth alive, but did not provide any meaningful historical or ethnological investigation. This story continued to circulate in the southern cultural imagination as late as 1968 with Margaret McMahon’s “Bladen Slave Was Also a Prince.”²⁵

American ethnologists took interest in Omar as well. In 1864, Theodore Dwight Jr., in “On the Sereculeh Nation, in Nigritia: Remarks on the Sereculehs, an African Nation, Accompanied by a Vocabulary of Their Language,” presented a letter that Omar wrote to Lamena. In 1869, George Post in “Arabic-Speaking Negro Mohammedans in Africa” provided some descriptions of Omar’s physical characteristics. In the twentieth century, Omar’s translated autobiography appeared in the pages of the *American Historical Review* (1925) and in the *Journal of Negro History* (1954). However, these

²⁵ For a complete bibliography of the Omar legend, please see Allan D. Austin’s *Sourcebook*.

articles could not disrupt the south's fascination with the "Arabian Prince." Quite simply, Omar's story was too good to deconstruct until the important works by Curtin, Austin, and others helped to separate Omar from the myths.

Omar was a Fulani from Tukolor, a group of people who abandoned their pastoral lifestyles early in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Unlike other African Muslims discussed in this project, Omar appeared black. As an account from the *Christian Advocate* described: "His complexion and hair, as well as the form of the head, are distinctly of the African character." During his childhood, his moderately wealthy father died, and Omar went to live with his older brother in Futa Jallon. There, he received a Muslim education. Sometime later in his early adulthood, Omar claimed that he had performed the Hajj in Mecca. While Austin doubts this story, there is evidence that many Muslims from Senegal did perform the yearly rite. As a trader, he dealt with standard West African commodities—whether he dealt in slaves is not known. Sometime in 1807, Omar participated in a war against the Bambara from Kaarta. The fetish Bambara overran the army and captured Omar. His role in the war is not completely clear, but most scholars agree about the ramifications: Omar was one of the last slaves legally to endure the Middle Passage.

In Charleston, Omar's first master was benevolent, and treated him well. Unfortunately for Omar, this master died, and his new owner forced him to perform arduous physical labor. Omar ran away from his master, and roamed the countryside for nearly a month. Matthew Grier for the Carolina Presbyterian described the aftermath:

Here he was taken up as a runaway, and placed in the jail. Knowing nothing of the language as yet, he could not tell who he was, or where he

was from, but finding some coals in the ashes, he filled the walls of his room with piteous petitions to be released, all written in the Arabic language. The strange characters, so elegantly and correctly written by a runaway slave, soon attracted attention, and many of the citizens of the town visited the jail to see him. (481)

When Mumford, the Sheriff of Cumberland County, realized that Omar was someone of interest, he brought the case to General James Owen—a local gentlemen of renown. Owen decided to take charge of the case personally, freed Omar and housed him at his own plantation. Realizing Omar was not suitable for manual labor, he bought him from the harsh owner. The situation took some time to get resolved because the owner did not want to free Omar. Nonetheless, after a lengthy period, Owen managed to buy Omar and made him into a servant at his plantation.

Owen treated Omar extremely well, recognizing his intelligence and dedication to Islam. At some point, Owen managed to secure an English translation of the Qur'an. In one of the more unusual events of American slavery, Owen took to reading the English version of the Qur'an to his slave, though as the article states, "often with portions of the Bible." Over time, Omar started to show interest in the Bible. Perhaps to impress his master and to gain for himself more peace at the plantation, Omar converted to Christianity. Reverend Dr. Snodgrass, of the Presbyterian Church in Fayetteville, baptized him. According to traditional accounts, Omar was serious about Christianity. However, recent research by Austin and Turner suggest that Omar did not take the religion seriously. They determine this by examining the fragmented pieces of writings that Omar tended to produce during his slavery. He rarely copied any part of the Arabic

Bible, although he occasionally reproduced the Lord's Prayer for an admiring audience—something that he would have learned during his stay in the south. Omar, also, tended to insert an occasional *Bismillah* in his writing, as shown by the writing sample that he produced for John F. Foard in 1855. Interestingly, Grier misread Omar's dedication:

Uncle Moreau is an Arabic scholar, reading the language with great facility, and translating it with ease. His pronunciation of the Arabic is remarkably fine. An eminent Virginia scholar said, not long since, that he read it more beautifully than any one he ever heard, save a distinguished savant of the University of Halle. His translations are somewhat imperfect, as he never mastered the English language, but they are often very striking. We remember once hearing him read and translate the twenty-third psalm, and shall never forget the earnestness and fervour which shone in the old man's countenance, as he read of the going down into the dark valley, and using his own broken English said, "Me, no fear, master's with me there." There were signs in his countenance and in his voice, that he knew not only the words, but felt the blessed power of the truth they contained. (Grier 482)

Apparently, Omar seemed satisfied with his life as a slave in the United States. He resisted any attempts by colonizers to repatriate him to Africa. Indeed, he showed a great aversion to it. According to one story, when Dr. Jonas King returned to this country from the East in 1828, he was introduced in Fayetteville to Omar. Owen noticed that Omar was reluctant to converse with Dr. King. After some time, Owen ascertained "that the only reason of his reluctance was his fear that one who talked so well in Arabic might have

been sent by his own countryman to reclaim him, and carry him again over the sea. After his fears were removed, he conversed with Dr. King with great readiness and delight” (Grier 483). Therefore, the question becomes: what does the narrative reveal about Omar’s attitudes and about his sense of “belonging” in the American south?

First, it is useful to summarize the text briefly. Omar begins with the traditional Islamic introduction: “In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.” Then he adds, “May God bless your Lord (*sayidikum*) Mohammad” (Alryyes 65). Afterwards, he inserts surah sixty-seven, known as al-Mulk (Dominion). At several points, he apologizes for having forgotten some Arabic verse and employs a “humble” rhetorical strategy common in slave narratives. He then repeats, “In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate” before addressing “Sheikh Hunter,” to whom he apologizes again for making mistakes. Afterwards, Omar offers a rudimentary sketch of his pre-slavery life in Africa, explaining that he had been in some sort of trouble back home and that he had no illusion of returning. Diouf, and Osman and Forbes suggest that Omar might have been reluctant on account of his pride to mention anything humiliating about defeat in battle. Osman and Forbes also make the point that he “wanted to please his master—a theme present throughout the text, such as in his Christian utterances—and therefore felt he should refrain from alluding too much to slavery” (336). He mentions the ordeals that he faced with his first master and his subsequent relocation to the Owen plantation. He then discusses the basic tenets of Islam and mentions how they were used in Africa. As Osman and Forbes point out, “notably, he does not use the past tense in his descriptions, indicating his probable clandestine continuation of the practices” (336). In this section, he

mentions both the *al-Fatiha* and the Christian Lord's Prayer. The narrative ends with a section where Omar praises the Owen family for their kindness in taking care of him.

In the beginning, Omar uses the slave narrative to open possibilities for introducing and preserving Islamic concepts. Considering that Omar had already written himself out of prison using Arabic characters, he must have realized that the letters and characters that he was transcribing represented a new and highly valued type of expression in the United States. For instance, we must examine the brief dedication at the beginning of the text: "The life of Omar ben Saeed, called Morro, a Fullah Slave, in Fayetteville, N.C., Owned by Governor Owen, Written by Himself in 1831 & sent to Old Paul, or Lahmen Kebby, in New York, in 1836, Presented to Theodore Dwight by Paul in 1836, Translated by Hon. Cotheal, Esq. 1848." Instead of a traditional authentication by a white editor, there is a dedication to another African Muslim, Lamena Kebe. This dedication establishes a chain of reception that demonstrates an African Muslim cartographical link and a bypassing of western lines of authorization.

In the opening passage of the narrative, it is easy to see beyond what the original translators might have missed and to recognize that Omar is inserting important parts of the Qur'an, complete with the customary introduction. He starts the narrative with the traditional Islamic introduction: "May God bless your Lord (*sayidikum*) Mohammad" (Alryyes 65). Then in a section several pages long, he produces surah sixty-seven. The *al-Mulk* (Dominion) requires some explanation because he uses the expressions of the Qur'an to introduce a new type of thinking in the American south. As Muhammad Asad in *The Message of the Qur'an* explains:

The fundamental idea running through the whole of this surah is man's inability ever to encompass the mysteries of the universe with his earthbound knowledge, and, hence, his utter dependence on guidance through divine revelation. Best known by the key-word *al-mulk* ("dominion") taken from its first verse, the surah has sometimes been designated by the Companions as "The Preserving One" (*Al-Waqiyah*) or "The Saving One" (*Al-Munjiyah*) inasmuch as it is apt to save and preserve him who takes its lesson to heart from suffering in the life to come (*Zamakhshari*). (67)

Omar suggests that human actions are insignificant, as are our beliefs about the nature of ownership. He employs the Arabic word *malaka* (possessed/owned) and makes Allah the final authority. In the context of American slavery, Omar's words are charged because he offers a message about the evils of the plantation system from a non-traditional perspective. Generally, the main voices of dissent came from Christian abolitionist discourses that opposed American slavery. Traditionally, the language of the Bible allowed African Americans to fashion a discourse of liberation. As Helen Thomas suggests, African American writers used their biographies to produce a "moment of cultural synthesis between (rival) hermeneutical discourses, that is, between the west's Christianized concept of the 'holy spirit' and its divine agency, and African spiritual epistemologies, including the belief in the transmigration of souls" (Thomas 167). Therefore, while these writers challenge the codified structures of western slavery, their commitment to Christianity becomes a bedrock of faith and stability that enables them to both criticize and enter modernity. Omar's appropriation of spiritual text is more

complicated because the Qur'an has not been traditionally used in anti-slavery discourses. Although Omar comes from a West African Islamic tradition that supported slavery—the Qur'an for the most part permits slavery—he seems to have adopted an anti-tolerant perspective thanks to firsthand experience with chattel slavery. In order to communicate his disapproval, he would have relied upon the type of literacy learned in West Africa—the Quran—to challenge the authority of the American slavemaster.

The beginning of the narrative also reveals Said's sense of being able to communicate without impediment. Typically, abolitionists placed limits on black expression. As Butterfield claims, during public speaking events slaves were asked to express concrete facts about their enslavement and often asked to show their bodies to provide real evidence of suffering. For African Americans, the slave narrative becomes a means of establishing their own voice and identity—of course, within limits and often under the control of authenticating editors. Omar's use of the Qur'an is an impressive display of maintaining his own authorial voice without editorial interference. The narrative becomes his expression, his creation, and testimony to document a lived experience in the New World, through the very words of the Qur'an. He employs an exhorting voice that opens topological tunnels and networks to voice his resistance, faith and displacement.

Omar addresses his audiences using a rhetorical style similar to that presented in the Qur'an. Particularly, Omar appropriates the form of "O" as he addresses his audience. Osman and Forbes note that "this general vocative, translated into English as 'O' with an accompanying subject, mirrors Qur'anic verses, such as 'O You who have attained to faith!' (e.g. Q. 57. 28; 58. 11–12; 60. 1, 10, 13; 61. 2, 10, 14; 63. 9), 'O Prophet!' (60. 12;

65. 1; 66. 1, 9), or ‘O humankind!’ (4. 1; 22. 1; 49. 13)” (337). In another section, Omar writes: “O people of America; O people of North Carolina: do you have, do you have, do you have such a good generation that fears God so much?” (81). The use of this technique only stresses that Omar was conscious of his displaced status in the American slave system and sought to insert an alternative cadence in order to mediate and mark a sense of territory.

In some ways, we can draw connections to Deleuze’s concept of the refrain. The refrain and repetition do not directly challenge southern culture, or produce a “symptom” of innate rebelliousness. Instead, it creates a minor niche in the American landscape, a sense of Islamic order in the chaos of the American slave system. According to Deleuze, each expression carries the land. The refrain that Said writes is meant to be constantly repeated—each time it is written, read aloud, there is an act of invention in a hostile terrain. The refrains interconnect him to his faith. However, they are momentary and fleeting—it will take Bilali twenty years later to develop their potential to demark an Islamic territory. Nonetheless, the refrains open up another way of seeing how Muslims used Qur’anic verse to fashion innovative manners of resistance. There is a lack of directness about the refrains, suggesting an employment of opacity and stealth about his writing.

Omar ends up having to develop an additional tool of creativity to supplement this refrain and employs something similar to what Glissant calls the *parole différée* or “detour” of meaning. Detours are elusive, where vital information is withheld or folded into loops. This aspect of the detour is a response to already existing territories controlled by the majority. The rhythms and cadences in the text become elusive and fleeting,

designed to operate under the radar. Detours allow us to understand that Said's conversion was fraught with ambivalence and his narrative reveals the struggle to develop a language of understanding. For instance, much can be determined from Said's word choice in the text. He does not mention the Middle Passage or address in detail his origins and previous life. The later sections of the narrative tend to be elaborate "detours" or disruptions because Omar often "forgets" key details in his life and ends up on unstable ground. The details about his capture are always murky, and whenever he discusses his life in Africa, he claims that he has forgotten much thanks to his old age. This "forgetting" should be explored briefly, which will tie to the problem of his conversion and the subtle discursive maneuvers in the text that reveal the anxieties of his negotiations of displacement.

After presenting al-Mulk, a curious section appears where Omar addresses Sheikh Hunter twice: "You asked me to write my life. I cannot write my life for I have forgotten much of my talk as well as the talk of the Arabs. Also I know little grammar and little vocabulary. O my brothers, I ask you in the name of Allah, not to blame me for my eye is weak and so is my body" (75). As part of this "memory" loss, he "forgotten much of my talk as well as the talk of the Maghreb" (73). In his forgetfulness, the "oral" speech of the Maghreb script has been silenced in same way as he has been removed from the "true" Arabic linguistic codes.

He then uses repetition and detour in a passage about his education in Africa that leads to some intriguing questions about his continued American resistance. He writes:

My name is Omar Ibn Said; my birthplace is Fut Tur, between the two rivers [or seas]. I sought knowledge according to the instructions . . . of a

Sheikh called Mohammad Said, my brother, and Shiekh Suleiman and Sheikh Jebril . . . Abdal. I continued seeking knowledge for twenty-five years, [then] I came to my place . . . for six years. [Then there] came to our country a big army. It killed many people. It took me, and walked me to the big Sea, and sold me into the hand of a Christian man who bought me and walked me to the big Ship in the big Sea. (75)²⁶

There is a subversive language deployed here that is both tactical and ambiguous. Although he converted to Christianity, he continually evokes Muslim terminology in his interaction with the American world, relying upon the word “Christian” to denote difference. A key aspect of the detour is that “it is not a conscious strategy of flight in the fact of reality” (as qtd in Britton 27). As Britton argues, “the detour is not freely chosen, rationally planned autonomous act of opposition, but neither is it simply an evasion” (27). There are language slips throughout the text that suggests a type of narrative instability that makes it difficult to ascertain clear meaning. In another example, at the beginning of the narrative, Omar explains his pre-American religion using a type of Islamic register:

before I came to the Christian country, my religion was the religion of ‘Mohammed, the Apostle of God - may God have mercy upon him and give him peace.’ I walked to the mosque before day-break, washed my face and head and hands and feet. I prayed at noon, prayed in the afternoon, prayed at sunset, prayed in the evening. I gave him alms every

²⁶ Voiced in this passage is his lineage or *ijāza*. What is fascinating here is the potential that his opacity could actually be a type of esoteric language shaped by the type of religious training that he received. No solid evidence suggests whether Omar practiced a Sunni or Sufi form of Islam. However, the register and texture of the aforementioned passage brings to mind Lamena Kebe’s exposition when he asks Theodore Dwight to become a seeker of knowledge.

year, gold, silver, seeds, cattle, sheep, goats, rice, wheat, and barley. I gave tithes of all the above-named things. I went every year to the holy war against the infidels. I went on pilgrimage to Mecca, as all did who were able. (82-83)

In the passage, Said's tone suggests that he is writing as a Muslim. He uses the term "Christian" to suggest religious difference and then discusses in detail aspects of his life. Then he mentions "Mohammed, the Apostle of God" and inserts the customary "may God have mercy upon him and give him peace," which suggests his continued adherence to Islamic tradition and veneration of the prophet's status in Islamic culture. Interestingly, he uses the word "infidels" to describe African pagans, a term not typically used in a western context. However, when discussing his captivity in the United States, the words shift and the register alters to appropriate a Christian milieu. An overlay of Christian themes appears, suggesting that Omar is conscious of the process of imitation and appropriation. He writes:

These men are good men. What food they eat they give to me to eat. As they clothe themselves they clothe me. They permit me to read the gospel of God, our Lord, and Saviour, and King; who regulates all our circumstances, our health and wealth, and who bestows his mercies willingly, not by constraint. According to power I open my heart, as to a great light, to receive the true way, the way of the Lord Jesus the Messiah. (81)

Specifically, words like “God” (instead of Allah), “Lord,” “Savior” and “King” suggest an incorporation of Christian rhetoric as part of his ongoing negotiations of the power structure of the American south.

In another passage, Said discusses the transition that he makes from the Qur’an to the Bible. Alryyes’s recent translation shows an African Muslim conscious of the ambivalent space that he occupies in the United States:

I am Omar, I love to read the book, the Great Koran.

General Jim Owen and his wife used to read the Bible, they used to read the Bible to me a lot. Allah is our Lord, our Creator, and our Owner and the restorer of our condition, health and wealth by grace and not duty. [According?] to my ability, open my heart to the Bible, to the path of righteousness. Praise by to Allah, the Lord of Worlds, many thanks for he grants bounty in abundance. (87)

The aforementioned passage does not convey a clear picture of conversion. Omar seems to manipulate the names of God to evade clarity and overlays one epistemological/religious foundation (Muslim) over another (Christian). While a cursory reading of the section indicates that Omar has “successfully” made the transition from Muslim to Christianity, any Muslim could have uttered the wording that he employs in the passage. Islam already accepted Jesus as a prophet of Allah and respected the earlier Biblical texts. For instance, Surah 21 verse 105 of the Qur’an reads: “Before this We wrote in the Psalms, after the Message (given to Moses): ‘My servants, the righteous, shall inherit the earth.’” Omar was conscious of this tradition of respecting believers of the “book” that Muhammad established, and used this knowledge to foster a sense of

vagueness in the text. This historical tradition of tolerance might help explain his “conversion:” “First, [following] Mohammed. To pray, I said: ‘Praise be to Allah . . . ’” followed by quoting the Fatiha: “And [but?] now, I pray in the words of our Lord Jesus the Messiah: ‘Our Father . . . ’” (89). As Osman and Forbes claim, “this rendering highlights the ambiguity in Omar’s statement. In fact, word for word, the text reads: ‘First, Mohammed. To pray, he said:’ followed by quoting the Fatiha. ‘And now, the words of our Lord Jesus the Messiah:’ followed by quoting the Lord’s Prayer” (341).

Omar places the *al-Fatiha* before the Lord’s Prayer. There is a Qur’anic based epistemology at play here to describe Christians. In many ways, Omar does not “think” like a Christian. There is a sense of negotiation here that offers intriguing avenues of critical analysis, revealing that his conversion was not complete and that he continued to practice many aspects of his Islamic faith. What results is an innovative form of syncretism that opens up a third space in the plantation. For example, in referring to Jesus, Omar uses the word Messiah. Even when Omar uses the word “Lord,” he does it in way that does not seem to accept the trinity; instead, he uses the word “Lord” as the appellation to refer to the line of prophets—describing Muhammad as well in such terms. Alryyes makes the point that Omar uses the term *sayyidikum* (Your Lord), which is not used often in these terms. In fact, Alryyes writes:

The normal formulaic construction sayidina: our Lord. By separating himself from the community of the readers, Omar overemphasizes Muhammad’s dominion over readers . . . By setting himself outside the group, he leaves no ambiguity that Mohammad is their Lord—that is, the group cannot be mistaken for ina. The singular possessive construction

sayidi, my Lord, is almost never used since the dominion is assumed from the whole community. (712)

If Alryyes is accurate with his translation, then what develops is a continuous sense of negotiation and appropriation of new discourses that reveal Said making the awkward discursive moves to assert some type of agency and control of his text. Detours and misdirection then become ways to interact in the uncertain ground between majority and minority discourses on the plantation.

A particular aspect of this detour is the deployment of irony that he uses to bridge his transition between the Christian and Islamic world. Omar seems to set up the binary Christian land/*dar-al-salam* in his imagination. The “Christian” becomes an important ethnological concept for him, symbolizing the dominant reality that he must address. When he writes about his captivity in Africa, Omar claims that “we sailed in the big Sea for a month and a half until we came to a place called Charleston. And in a Christian language, they sold me” (77). English, for instance, is a Christian language. Osman and Forbes point out that when Omar discusses his captivity, he uses a type of vague language. For instance, he lives near a city called “Charleston in the Christian language.” He spent time in a “jeel in the Christian language.” Afterwards, he saw many men “whose language was Christian.” Yet, when they spoke to him, he could not “understand the Christian language.” In other examples, Omar describes Johnson, his first owner as “an evil man,” “an infidel (Kafir) who did not fear Allah at all. He was “sold to a Christian man” where the language of exchange was “Christian.”²⁷ In this regard, there is

²⁷ See Osman and Forbes 341.

a two-ness about his discourse, revealing that he navigates through the displaced zones in the plantation as he confronts the basic inequalities of the slave system.

Ultimately, this narrative signifies a process of “becoming-other,” which means constructing an identity within a formerly hostile place and aligning himself with the slave institution that Owen represents. This act of hybridity does not mean conformity to the system, but a subtle manipulation of the power system where Omar alters the structure of the slave narrative language and attempts in small ways to make it new. In other words, instead of codification, and repeating the ideological and political imperatives of the American Colonization Society, he chooses to slip into new linguistic spaces adaptation and preservation and invent a new expression of his displacement.

The Diary of Ben Ali: Opacity, Refrains and Territory

Bilali Mohammad for all practical purposes was an *almaamy* or al-imam of the Sapelo Island Muslims. He wore a fez, prayed facing Mecca on his prayer rug, and observed the five pillars of the faith. According to local legend, Bilali Mohammed was buried facing Mecca with a copy of his Qur’an. There is little doubt that Bilali Muhammad attracted attention because he did not conform to the conventional stereotypes that defined the black slave in America. Before his death, Bilali asked Francis Robert Goulding to preserve his writings, which he claimed were a chronicle of his adventures and life as a Muslim slave. The document has been a source of much academic conjecture because scholars have had difficulty translating it.

When it comes to biographical material, unfortunately there is not much known about Bilali. Most information derives from a few excerpts from William Brown Hodgson, Francis Goulding, interviews of descendants of Bilali's grandchildren in the book *Drums and Shadows*, an article by Joseph Greenberg, and the important research by Allan Austin. This makes Bilali a shadowy figure who is most known for a book that no one could read.

Bilali was born in Timbo, Guinea, probably in the 1780s. According to Hodgson, Bilali's education was tied in some manner to the Jakhanke centers of Bani Isra'ila, Qayrawan, and Gunjur. He was enslaved sometime in his mid-teens. He eventually found himself taken to the coast and then shipped to the Bahamas. According to the sources, he spent a considerable amount of time on the island, and raised a large family. As Mohammad A. al-Ahari explains, "he married his four wives (Fatima, Phoebe, Hester, and Margaret) and started his large family of twelve sons (Harun, Sulaliman, Bilali, Ben Ali and others who haven't been traced) and seven daughters (Charlotte, Fatima, Margaret, Yoruba, Medina, Binty, and Phoebe)" (15). Eventually, Thomas Spaulding bought Bilali and much of his family. Spaulding seemed impressed by Bilali's natural qualities as a leader.

On Spaulding Island, Bilali and his family tried to establish themselves, but they did not seem to "belong" to the slave community. Georgia Byran Conrad noted the basic linguistic difference that distinguished the group: "They conversed with us in English, but in talking among themselves they used a foreign tongue that no one else understood" (AMAA 275). She also noted that they were believers of "Mahomet" and that "they held themselves aloof from the others as if they were conscious of their own superiority"

(AMAA 275). When it came to work, Bilali was a driver of the plantation and oversaw approximately four hundred slaves. During the War of 1812, he helped to prevent the British from landing on the island. According to Spaulding, Bilali said, “I will answer for every Negro of the true faith, but none of the Christian dogs you own” (Wylly 52). On another occasion, Bilali saved hundreds of slaves when a hurricane struck the island. Unfortunately, there is not any additional information about him. He managed to pass his faith unto his children and he seemed to have lived his life as a Muslim. According to some documents, Bilali was buried with a copy of the Qur’an and his sheepskin prayer rug. What remains of Bilali is his purported “diary” that has evaded disentanglement for nearly a century.

The Diary of Ben Ali has had rich history. Initially Captain Benjamin Lloyd had given the document to the Georgia State Library. Benjamin’s father, Francis Goulding, had been a friend of Bilali in the 1850s. In a signed affidavit, Benjamin testified that Bilali had handed the document to Francis in 1859. Eventually, the diary became part of the University of Georgia collection. Since then, many researchers have taken an interest in this document. It is worth constructing a brief epistemology of study because it becomes apparent that Bilali and his diary have been subject to much speculation and misunderstanding.

The earliest of the researchers was William Brown Hodgson. Since Bilali and Salih Bilali were good friends who lived in neighboring plantations on the Georgia Island, it is logical that Hodgson would have some type of contact with this slave. At the end of his chapter on the Fulanis, Hodgson writes:

Mr. Spaulding of Sapelo has, among his negroes, one called Bul-Ali, who writes Arabic and speaks the Foulah language. Tom and himself are intimate friends. He is now [1839] extremely old and feeble. Tom informs me that he is from Timboo. If so, he can only throw light on the western portion of the Foulah nation. (74)

Although Hodgson does not say much about Bilali in *Notes*, he continued to be a center of interest for him. In 1859, Hodgson made Bilali a formal figure of study in a paper delivered to the American Ethnological Society of New York called, “The Gospels: Written in the Negro Patois of English with Arabic Characters.” Hodgson’s initial ethnological description tends to be the most accurate in the historiography of Bilali’s research. In order to set the record straight, Hodgson offers a rough character sketch:

A biographical sketch of another Mohammedan Foolah slave, Bul-ali . . . may be found in my “Notes on Northern Africa” published some years ago. This Mohammedan, the trustworthy servant of Mr. Spaulding of Sapelo Island, Georgia, died recently, at an advanced age. He adhered to the creed and to the precepts of the Qur’an. He wrote Arabic, and read his sacred book with constancy and reverence. It is understood, and his numerous descendants, who are Christians, buried him with the Qur’an resting on his breast. He left various papers, supposed to be ritual, which, I hope, to be preserved. (74)

There was not much serious philological investigation of the diary until the publication of Benjamin Lloyd Goulding’s affidavit in October 1931. Benjamin had testified that the document was an adventure tale, written in the mode of traditional slave narratives of the

period. That claim is problematic because the document does not readily translate from traditional Arabic and would have been impossible to discern for a person without expertise in the language and in African linguistics. Nonetheless, the affidavit stood as the “official” story because of the connection between the owner and the author.

Goulding explains that “Ben Ali was a particular friend of my father in the last years of his life . . . [and] visited him often and had numerous interviews with him.”

In the document, Goulding considers Bilali something unusual in the racial makeup of the south. He echoes the claims that Griffin made concerning ar-Rahman, and argues that Bilali is an Arab prince who “had the reputation of being an unusually intelligent man” and who “was a splendid specimen of manhood, rather tall, strong and had a fine physique.” Goulding declares Bilali as “a man reputed to have been an Arab slave hunter, who himself became a slave.” It is apparent that the allure of having an Arab in the United States only seemed to strengthen the uniqueness of the tale. The thought of an Arab only drew to the exoticism of another world, and possibly to the famed stories of *Arabian Nights*. Goulding envisions an indirect mastery of the Orient through the south’s ability to convert slaves to Christianity because Bilali “later . . . became a Christian and died a member of the Baptist faith.”

Interestingly, Gould also mentions that Bilali’s story inspired Joel Chandler Harris to write *The Story of Aaron (So Named) the Son of Ben Ali*. Chandler was friends with Francis Goulding and managed to view the diary. Chandler did not have the expertise to read the document. He instead relied upon Goulding’s recollection of Bilali’s life. In Chapter 12, Chandler uses the historical Bilali as a model for Ben Ali. A formal reading of the chapter would take up considerable space, but it is worth noting one

important section. The novel depicts the adventures of Aaron and three children of the plantation. Aaron possesses magical powers and speaks to various animals. When it comes to plantation life, Aaron does not consider himself part of the slave community and looks down upon other slaves. A book written in an unusual script that no one can read separates him from slaves. When a child slave, Druscilla, questions him about the text, Aaron replies, “‘It’s the talk of Ben Ali,’ said Aaron—‘Ben Ali, my daddy. Every word here was put down by him.’” Language becomes the chief mode of identification and separation. Aside from the simple fact that Aaron has the ability to speak to animals, he can read a text that is illegible to other members of the community. Harris’s version helps to establish the official story behind Bilali’s identity. Several decades later, Benjamin’s authentication merely reinforced what had been part of the southern lexicon. Yet, how could the diary have been the source of their stories when none of them could actually read it?

This leads to a problem of translation that affects the document to this day. Ella May Thornton, head librarian of the Georgia State Library from 1925 to 1956, spent much time trying to find scholars who could decipher the document accurately. Since the document proved difficult to translate, many scholars tended to rely upon the supporting documents that Harris and Goulding provided. In 1937, Maxfield Parrish of St. Simons Island, sent the document to Melville Herskovits, who was a noted Africanist, and the diary’s story started to unravel. Herskovits handed the document to one of his graduate students Joseph Greenberg, who would eventually become an important figure in the categorization of the African language groups. In 1940, Greenberg published “The

Decipherment of the ‘Ben Ali Diary’ a Preliminary Statement,” in *Journal of Negro History*.

Greenberg’s work helped to unravel the myth that Goulding and Harris had created. He took the document to Northern Nigeria and interviewed “certain native *Malams*, or learned men, of the city of Kano” (373). Although the *Malams* greeted the document with suspicion, and “declared the writing to be the work of jinn,”²⁸ Greenberg eventually deduced that the document could be deciphered if he rearranged some consonants. He focused in the beginning where a name is written that does not correspond necessarily with the author. Greenberg then realized that “in spite of the incorrect genealogy, ‘Muhammad b. (son of) ‘abdullh b. Yusuf b. ‘eubaid,’ it might well refer to ‘abu Muhammad ‘abdullah b. ‘abi Zaid ‘alqairawani,’ a native of Qairawan in North Africa, and the author of the a well-known legal work, *ar-Risāla*” (373). This helped establish that the document was a diary, as Goulding and Harris had thought. Although Greenberg helped penetrate the elusive nature of the language, he does not shed light on the “meaning” of the text. For Greenberg, the document is an exercise in African philology. The text contains many different spellings that do not correspond to classical *al-‘arabiya* orthography, which Greenberg interprets as follows:

it is to be conjectured that at the time of the writer’s departure from Africa he was still a young student. Books are first taught by oral memorization; and it is apparent that this manuscript was written by a man who had memorized the text . . . making the errors that might be expected Not only do we encounter the confusions we might expect from the ordinary

²⁸ Sprites

Sudanese pronunciation of Arabic . . . but we also find that the voiced and unvoiced consonants have not been differentiated” (374)

Greenberg’s proclamation makes Ben Ali’s document not representative of the standard Arabic. In many ways, Greenberg does not assume any type of positionality that forces him to understand the particular circumstances, or much less the opacity of the document as an artifact of cultural production. Instead, the document is an example of Arabic *tashīf* – the concept of misspelling, misidentification and misreading that many Arabic scholars have written about, especially in relation to potentially inaccurate transcriptions of Qur’anic materials. Greenberg, basing his methodology upon classical *al‘arabīya* script and pronunciation, essentially considers the document unreadable—and hence illogical. The problem remains that Greenberg did not have an adequate knowledge of Fulani written script. While he uses the original *ar-Risāla* as the referent in order to translate important parts of the document, he does not recognize, or consider significant, that Bilali’s text is a composite of three writing systems of the region, Fulani, patois and classical Arabic. It is here where Bilali’s opacity becomes “apparent” because the document simply cannot be reduced to matters of conventional orthography and rendered as “illogical.” Later researcher Parish would make a similar argument as well. Judy and Progler have successfully “translated” much of the text and argued that the text is actually “logical.”

If this is the case, then we need to consider the reality of the religious situation in the Sapelo Islands that required Bilali to produce this text. Apparently, Bilali wrote to document the rituals of the faith and to mark his sense of his location. Hitchcock’s reading of Glissant offers an intriguing way to approach Bilali’s narrative when he writes

that “the task of the writer in this sense is not to occupy the space of history, but to make space for history” (34). In this regard, the opaque text intervenes in local Christian tradition and becomes a visible marker of Islamic permanence.

The text is roughly twelve and one half pages long. It is impossible to determine whether this is the complete document. Between page 6 and page 7, there are missing pages. Unfortunately, research has not discovered any additional pages in the last century. So what is present is at best a fragmentary document. The document is in poor shape, with faded ink in some sections and bleed-through in others. Only the first seven and one half pages are readable. In terms of organization, each chapter starts off with the word *bab*, which means “door.” The first section reproduces the traditional benediction to Allah and then praises the prophet. The second section is a brief excerpt that Judy considers “something of an epigraph” (238). The third section, starting on page 7, is *al-Wudā’* the ritual ablution from *ar-Risāla*. The final section, starting on page 9, is a reprint of “Chapter on Prayer” or *as-salah* that deals with prayer procedure.

Bilali names the chapters “*babs*,” which suggests that he is opening doors to alternative states of seeing and transcription. There is a sense of experimentation, where he fashions a text that does not yield to the linguistic conventions of standard American slave narrative discourse or to the conventional Arabic *al-‘arabiya*. The text forms the basis of a productive force that establishes connections and grants the West African subject in the New World a momentary sense of agency.

Bilali evokes the call to Allah and the prophet, which situates the text within the tradition of other forms of Islamic writing. In writing the *bismillahi*, Bilali acknowledges the supremacy of Allah’s will and retains the tradition that has been an epigram in

Islamic writing since the prophet ordered it be written in the beginning of his writings. As Progler suggests, Bilali was “familiar with some basic formulas, and he knew the conventions that are followed by many writers and speakers” (24). He then produces an assemblage of subjects and identities who are “responsible” for the text’s creation. Bilali writes: “Verily, the master and jurist [*stadh al-fakih*] Muhammad ‘Abdullah ibn Yusuf ibn ‘abd al-Qarawanidu, may Allah have mercy upon and increase his blessings, amen, said [kala] (qtd in Judy 240).²⁹ Mentioning al-Qarawanidu in this introduction raises some important questions about the nature of the “narrator” of the text. To decipher this point, it is important first to discuss briefly the historical significance of *ar-Risāla* itself and then to return to the question of narration.

Ar-Risāla is a text by ‘Abdullah ibn Abi Zayd al-Qayrawani, which gained a position of importance in the *ilm-ul-kalam*. Based on the doctrines of Abu Hanifa, *ilm-ul-kalam* is the science of discourse that allows students to use logic in order to defend basic belief. Ibn Khaldun and al-Ghazali considered the science as a critical way to use intellect in order to support the divinity of Qur’anic material, and more importantly, as a way to dispel heretical texts and Islamic sects that deviate from traditional Sunni schools of thought. The text itself was an important Sunni document of the tenth century used throughout West Africa that defined the proper “methodology for realizing the Qur’an’s principle meanings in life” (Judy 248).

There is also an important political component behind *ar-Risāla*. Al-Qayrawani was a dissenting voice within Fatimid Egypt in 945 AD. During this period, the Ismaili sect of Shia Islam had come into prominence in North Africa and established the Fatimid

²⁹ I have cited carefully the original source of all Arabic translations in this project. I have handled all Qur’an interpretations in this project unless otherwise noted.

Dynasty. This sect believed in the prominence of seven imams, and subsequently constructed an esoteric cosmology based partly on Shia Islam, and Neoplatonic thought that stood as heretical to the recognized schools of orthodox Sunni Islam. A major problem for the dynasty, which would conquer modern day Egypt, was that many of its subjects were Sunnis of the Maliki school. This orthodox group resisted the new caliphates of Egypt and attempted to preserve their Maliki doctrines in face of the esoteric religion. Al-Qayrawani's text, by establishing itself and explicating the Maliki tradition of Sunni *fiqh* (jurisprudence), combats the centralized Fatimid state philosophy and becomes a document of resistance.

In the context of New World resistance, it is not difficult to see how Bilali draws a parallel (consciously or unconsciously) between his time in the United States, and the suffering that he experienced living in a Christian land, and al-Qarawanidu's resistance of the Fatimid Dynasty. Although Bilali is the narrator in the conventional sense, his use of *ar-Risāla* clearly evokes a tradition of jurisprudence where he aligns with an assemblage of Islamic concepts, voices and ideas outside his body. The lack of a clear subject defined through a linear, transparent, "I-driven" framework means that Bilali is producing a text that does not subscribe to traditional slave narrative notions of subjectivity. Judy makes the claim that since Bilali was educated in Timbo, he would have been trained to construct a genealogy or *ijāza*, which means authorization or license. According to the *Dictionary of Islamic Philosophy*, *ijāza* suggests that an authorized guarantor of a text or of a whole book grants another person the permission to transmit it. Since Bilali had not become a *mujāz*, or a person allowed to write, he establishes a genealogy to someone who could. Judy explains: "Instead, he invokes the proper name of someone already

determined as licensed and so licensing. In invoking al-Qarawanidu's name Ben Ali displaces his lack of authority to read by reading behind his imam, by transcribing his own repetitive recitation of al-Qarawanidu's *ar-Risāla*" (269).³⁰

We can read more into this intriguing notion of subjectivity if we consider the concept of opacity. Opacity means hiding from the outside gaze of the colonists, for whom unfettered vision is a crucial part of control and appropriation. Bilali "hides" when falling into line with previous writers and readers of *ar-Risāla*. There is also a complex form of inter-subjectivity here. In a sense, he is trying to bring a new form of expression, a type of opaque language of fragments, into being. In this case, there is not going to be any clear depiction of subjectivity or accessibility. As Hitchcock writes, "opacity resists the notion that the Other can be assimilated to the colonial Self—it is a direct intervention against the logic of recognition and denial that structures colonial authority . . ." (39). For Bilali, it seems to be a question of negotiating new identity formations and finding new ways to express a Muslim voice in the American southern experience. By stating his *ijāza*, he is communicating a collective consciousness and expressing a type of resistance that confounds the clarity of meaning located in most slave narratives.

An important question becomes: how can we be sure that Bilali could actually write and understand his diary? Greenberg and Parrish relied upon their notion of correct Arabic as a basis for stating that the language in the diary could be described in terms of "error," "confusion" and "mistake." Proglor suggests that Bilali's language use could be imagined in terms of "innovation." While this is an important contribution to the reading of the diary, the question of innovation can be addressed more productively in terms of

³⁰ For a closer examination of this later portion of this paragraph, in context to deconstruction, please refer to Judy.

deliberate distortion or opacity. As both Judy and Progler suggest, Bilali is consistent in the ways he uses Arabic words. One area of contention is the use of consonants in the text. Progler explains:

In standard Arabic, there are two ‘s’ sounds, two ‘t’ sounds, two ‘d’ sounds, and two ‘z’ sounds. In addition, there is a ‘q’ sound and a ‘k’ sound. These five sounds in general are among those that many non-native speakers of Arabic will tend to interchange. Generally, it is often very difficult for the beginning learner of Arabic to distinguish between the like sound letters. (22)

The problem becomes that there are instances where the “mistakes” are not consistent. Greenberg notes that the ‘y’ sound tends to replace the ‘j’ sound and that ‘l’ sound tends to be used place of the ‘d’ (Greenberg 374-375). There is clearly some incorporation of regional Arabic and African dialects into this text. Trimmingham suggests that the Arabic word for mosque, *masjid*, is replaced by the word *masyidi*, which was used in parts of Futa Jallon. Progler points out that Bilali uses many contractions in his writing to join “together short words that would not normally be joined in formal or standard Arabic” (22). Taken together, there is not any sense of imitation of the traditional Arabic form. Instead, there is a poetic language where the author evokes a strategy of hybridization or something that Glissant would have called in his own specific linguistic context creolization, which constructs new kinds of forms, distinct from the orthodoxy of the classical Arabic used to decipher the *ilm-ul-kalam*.

One of the most important points suggesting that Bilali understood his endeavors rests on page 2 of the document. Bilali writes, “there is no strength except in Allah. I seek

refuge in Allah most High and Mighty” (qtd in Progler 25) and then a series of salutations to the Prophet and to the first four caliphs, generally known as the Four Rightly Guided Caliphs. When writing out the order of these caliphs, Bilali makes an initial mistake. He writes, “Allah’s blessings be upon our master. I hear witness that Muhammad is our protector then Abu Bakr, then ‘Omar, then ‘Uthman, then ‘Ali, may God be pleased with them all” (25). As Progler convincingly argues, Bilali mistakenly inserted Uthman before Omar. He crossed out the name and then proceeded writing again. This establishes that Bilali understood what he was writing and had not merely memorized key passages of Islamic text. This is a stark rebuttal to Martinovich’s assertion in the 1950s that Bilali “had only an imitative visual memory of Arabic” (*AMAA* 306). With the question of “ability” reasonably determined, now it is important to explore the connotations that arise from producing this work.

Bilali’s opacity works in a manner of misdirection or “detours” that yield tactical ambiguous meanings. In Deleuzian terms, the notion of detour means finding ways around obstruction—namely the State’s ability to impede the motion of rhizomatic flows. Bilali employs detours in his writing somewhat differently as a way to disguise his intent rather than directly challenging oppression. The most important way he employs these detours is using the Qur’an in novel ways within the narrative form. In such ways, the Qur’an forges a New World language.

In one section, Bilali pieces together several passages of Qur’anic verse: “As for he who is given his book in his right hand [69:19 and 84:7], he shall be reckoned with by an easy reckoning [84:8]. And as for he who is given his book in his left hand [69:25] and behind his back [84:10], he shall be committed to the flaming fire [84:12]” (Progler 25-

26). The notion of left hand and right hand is symbolic of good and evil. The “book” in this case is the testimony of one’s personal life that Allah uses to determine sin and salvation. Progler suggests that “in the exegesis of the Qur’an, related verses such as these are often cited in conjunction with one another, although they don’t appear in the Qur’an in this way” (26). What this means is that Bilali is aware of their relationship and could piece together relevant sections of Arabic text. If this is accurate, then he seems to manipulate Qur’anic verse to make a statement about the dehumanizing nature of enslavement and the potential risks for sinners who do not submit to Allah’s authority.

On page 6 of the diary, Bilali uses some more Qur’anic passages about the issue of judgment and resistance. Progler finds the phrase, “the fires of hell.” The concept of hell and punishment is a repeating theme in the Qur’an, so that should not suggest much. Bilali, however, seems to focus on a particular form, *nar jahannam*, which is only found in a few verses from the same Qur’anic chapter called “Chapter of Repentance.” A crucial aspect of these chapters is that transgressors of Allah’s power are called “Hypocrites.” These are people who perform evil, and beg forgiveness without being earnest or continue to lives in states of *haram* (sin). Bilali’s documentation of this passage seems directed at those Christians who have not repented before the eyes of Allah and have not accepted a path of surrender. Those who transgress the law of Allah will suffer because they cannot hide their actions and deeds. Evidence for this type of reading can be located in a non-Qur’anic prayer that he includes in the text. Bilali writes down a separate prayer, or *du’o*. Within Islamic tradition, prayers from esteemed scholars, Sufis and religious men generally supplemented readings of the Qur’an. Progler translates the section: “Mohammad is Your prophet. I seek refuge in You from the

temptation of life . . . and from the temptation of the disbeliever and from the temptation of the Christian . . . peace be upon you and upon the virtuous worshippers of Allah” (28).

This prayer is particularly crucial toward understanding Bilali’s attempts to stake his position in the United States as a Muslim subject. There is a sense of fear in the passage. Bilali does not wish to lose his Muslim identity and yields to the authority of Allah in order to resist the temptation to convert to Christianity. This moment signifies a desire to resist the teleology of western thought and asserts the necessity to resist encroachment of Christianity in the way African Muslims frame their experiences in the New World. The most intriguing aspect of the *du’o* is the last sentence. Proglor suggests that the phrase is commonly used at the end of prayers.

Interestingly, he also suggests that the statement could be directed toward others. This possibility opens an innovative way of approaching the text. If we consider that Bilali asked that the narrative be preserved at all costs, and that he was an *almaamy* of the region, then it is highly probable that he was directing the *du’o* toward other members of the local community to maintain their traditions and beliefs. If this trajectory is accurate, then we must examine how Bilali attempts to maintain the Islamic faith on the island. He does it through an inventive process of transforming the plantation into an Islamic sonic landscape. The last portion of the narrative reveals an important connection between place, chanted verse and repetition. To examine this important section, it is useful to explore the concept of the Deleuzian “refrain” in order to shed more light on this process. In Bilali’s use of the verse, the sound of the Arabic overtones comforts and orients him within the slave system. The vocal repetition of the Qur’an means a

momentary determination of the center, organizing and stabilizing, keeping chaos and the threat of “assimilation” at bay. As Deleuze argues, repetition is the power of difference and differentiation. It constrains and condenses singularities. Since repetition accelerates or decelerates time, it can also alter space and time.

Bilali produces simple prayers. They are not complete sets of rituals and wholesale transcriptions of the Qur’an. Instead, they are bits and pieces. For instance, in the later sections of the narrative, Bilali explains the accepted ways to perform Islamic ritual. He writes the proper washing of the body or *wudu*, the call to prayer, and to other prayers that a Muslim would follow throughout the course of the day. This establishes the necessity of repetition in order to preserve Islamic tradition. He explains how to wash hands and the face as part of the absolution ritual that Muslims perform five times daily. Specifically, he mentions that the hands and the face must be washed three times. He repeats the Arabic word, *thalathan*, which means “three times.” In addition to the face and hands, he mentions the rituals for washing the feet and knees. A rhythm within the repetition of the rituals posits an alternative cadence. He ultimately ends this particular section with:

After *wudu*, say, oh Allah I bear witness that there is no God but Allah, alone and without partners. I bear witness that Muhammad is the prophet of Allah. I bear witness that the kingdom is His, and all praise is His, and He resurrects and He causes to die and He is all powerful over everything. (qtd in Proglor 30).

There is the lyrical or the “sonic” where the displaced subject lingers within the repetition and cadence of the recited Qur’anic verses, themselves. As Hasty suggests, “rhythm

implies participation and sympathy. We are drawn into the event in order to experience its rhythm. As something experienced, rhythm shares the irreducibility and unrepeatability of experience” (12). The “subject” is hidden or lost in the sonic flows of verse. Music is the metaphor used to mark out territory. At issue is resisting the hegemonic voices of white civilization and preserving the last traces of Islamic language and identity. This means that on page 10, the *adhan* or call to prayer becomes a rally call for the community that situates itself around the center that he provides. As Charles S. Wyllie remarked, “each day Ben Ali faced East and called upon Allah,” (qtd in Parrish 28).

The third function of the refrain provides empowerment and agency to its listeners. This gives a voice to the small Muslim community living in the area and potentially to future communities. Through appropriating the refrain, they have a voice that allows them to enunciate themselves differently. In the process, they create a new social space, home or social condition that enables them to “become-minor” or to transform their identities within a new reality. The repeated passages mark the territory of the Sapelo Island, which creates a space of comfort and a home base. In the opacity of the song, there is also the ability to extend the secure interiority of the home; “home” is a concept that travels with the song and verse where Bilali can cope with the struggles of slavery.

We can assume that Bilali addresses the unequal power relationship by having his narrative make a small mark in the American landscape. He writes an opaque document that does not reveal its secrets to western observers easily. Nonetheless, we can pierce the heterography and locate Deleuzian refrains that defy normative boundaries of slave

narrative convention. They are fragments of the Qur'an that mark out territory or the boundaries of the *um 'ma* in the "chaos" of the American south. As J. Macgregor Wise explains, in his own reading of Deleuze and Guattari, territory creates the subject: "The space called home is not an expression of the subject. Indeed, the subject is an expression of the territory, or rather of the process of territorialization. . . . We are who we are, not through an essence that underlies all our motions and thoughts, but through the habitual repetition of those motions and thoughts" (114-15). The refrain underscores the significance of the importance of sound—the chanted Qur'anic prayers, the call to prayer—in the construction of space and, to quote Macgregor's own reading of de Certeau and Giard, "the orality in the construction of identity, home, and everyday life" (115). Within Bilali's refrain, there is a combination of temporal and spatial terrains. In the rhythm of the verses, there is resonance that ultimately demarks territory. As Deleuze reminds us, the refrain "always carried earth with it" (D & G 312)

The next two chapters will consider two African Muslims who exploit further the ambivalent discourse of American slavery in order to negotiate their sense of displacement. Instead of adopting and manipulating strategies of epistemological and cultural indeterminacy, as shown in the previous chapters, Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua and Nicholas Said employ slightly different forms of creative adaption to western modernity, and enter innovative discourses of mobility, fluidity and hybridity to depict their American displacement.

Chapter 4: The Displacement of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua

In 1854, a small company in Michigan published *The Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua* (1854), written by an African Muslim living in Chatham, Canada. Unfortunately, Baquaqua's career as a writer for the Free Baptist Mission was short-lived. The narrative suffered from poor distribution and the copies that entered the market did not sell very well. Although a financial failure, the narrative has survived into modern times and offers a revealing look at the plight of a fugitive African Muslim who negotiated the various disjunctures, discontinuities and dislocations of slavery in the Americas. At times chaotic in its narrative structure and storytelling, and other times held hostage to the overdetermined conventions of the genre, Baquaqua's narrative presents the unique story of a heroic African Muslim migrant who left behind a performative text.

Baquaqua slips into the various roles and traditions as he subversively creolizes master codes and creates identities. He does not attempt to become ingrained within the national framework, but to remain at the outskirts, probing the displaced contact zones between marginal and majority discourses. Baquaqua does not "mimic" colonial master codes like Ayuba Suleiman Diallo and Ibrahima Abd ar-Rahman. Instead, he is transformed by his experiences in western modernity and its various political outlets. We gain a sense that Baquaqua negotiates the shifting configurations of power and movement and creates temporary identities in his maneuvers through various American political discourses in order to return home to Africa. This chapter shows that Baquaqua appropriates various western literary genres, such as the spiritual autobiography and the heroic fugitive tradition, writes himself into the displaced regions between dominant and

marginal discourses and documents a mode of resistance based on living a life of hybridity, camouflage and mobility.³¹

Background, Assemblages and Authenticity

Baquaqua's narrative appeared during an important time in the history of the slave narrative. The genre had matured considerably from its transatlantic origins. The 1840s and 1850s witnessed the "classical age" of the slave narrative period. Important works by Frederick Douglass, Josiah Henson and William Wells Brown attracted considerable attention in the United States, and made vital contributions in the fight to abolish slavery. During this period, abolitionists and the slave narrators established the basic conventions and tropes of the narrative genre that would play an important role in the formation of an African American literary tradition. Baquaqua's narrative is the only African Muslim slave narrative molded slightly by these tropes.

The question becomes: what makes the narrative such an amalgamation of disparate parts and hybrid of genres? The narrative is divided into three sections that mark Baquaqua's complicated negotiation of the various literary traditions that will mold his narrative. In the first section, there seems to be a traditional authentication page. However, upon closer examination, editor Samuel Moore treads similar ground that Thomas Bluett and other African Muslim editors faced: the authentication of ethnological and narrative materials that he could not possibly have seen. He validates Baquaqua's "testimony," depicts him as a heroic fugitive and attempts to convince his readership that Baquaqua should return to West Africa as a missionary. The second section is a

³¹ See Lavie and Swedenberg in the Introduction to *Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity* 7.

haphazard patchwork of African ethnology where Baquaqua challenges western conceptions of African savagery and backwardness. The section is haphazardly constructed with no regard toward linear narrative. In the third section, Baquaqua writes in the first person and appropriates the persona of the heroic fugitive. Seemingly, this is a more conventional section as he documents his travels throughout the Atlantic, explains how he escapes slavery and transforms into a sincere Christian with aspirations of spreading the gospel in his homeland.

It is worth noting that the disjointed nature of the narrative has caused some scholars to question whether Baquaqua had actually written the narrative. In *African Muslims in Antebellum America*, Allan Austin argues that “George A. Pomeroy, a sympathetic printer; Samuel Downing Moore, an interested fellow who claimed to be a writer; and J.G. Darby and Moses Sutton, local artists, combined to produce Baquaqua’s book” (170). This assertion is not a surprising because Austin depicts Baquaqua as an unintelligent opportunist of limited literary skills. In the introduction of *The Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua*, Lovejoy and Law refute Austin and suggest that Baquaqua was for the most part the author of the narrative. They note that Moore writes that the narrative was “written and revised from his [Baquaqua’s] own words” (9). Furthermore, Law and Lovejoy argue: “‘written here evidently means ‘written down’ rather than ‘composed,’ the implication being that Moore put into writing an account given orally by Baquaqua—an inference which is confirmed by the wording of some passages in Moore’s Preface to the book” (9).

If Lovejoy and Law are correct, Baquaqua influenced the final version of the *Biography*.³² This factor suggests that Baquaqua was not mimicking an identity that was inscribed by his editors. Instead, he directly assumed responsibility for creating this identity and fashioning it into new forms.

Marion Wilson Starling notes that abolitionists were always on the alert for new voices and speakers from the newly freed slaves (1988 xxvi). Baquaqua's perspective and testimony not only lent, to borrow the words of William Lloyd Garrison from a different context, a "powerful impetus" to the "anti-slavery enterprise," but also played an active role in the international aspirations of the abolitionist movement. Baquaqua presents himself as an ideal candidate who can navigate the middle ground between western "modernity" and African "ignorance." He challenges western depictions and stereotypes of West Africa. In this capacity, he is a type of activist. However, he also marks the sense of transformation that his travels have produced. He attempts to use his persona, one manufactured and developed in the west, to establish a model of West African identity not based on traditional racial subordination, but based on the potential and ability of literate Africans to assume control of their own destinies.

³² For the sake of historical grounding, it is worth stating that outside sources can authenticate Baquaqua's story. Although much in his account of West Africa is problematic, his general statements about the nature of government, history and commerce of the region tend to be accurate. Occasionally, he uttered erroneous facts about well-documented political events and individual reigns. There are many reasons for these errors, but deliberate deception is not a likely cause. When it comes to presenting evidence in the US, it seems that much of his story is accurate. Various newspaper resources relay his tribulations in New York. Documents from the various abolitionist societies offer a revealing glimpse of his life during his later years—particularly of the trail of failure that seemed to follow him in North America. Occasionally, Baquaqua contradicted himself when relating his personal life details. Specifically, for Austin, this tends to make the ethnographical material "unreliable" (161). Perhaps a major problem develops because what Baquaqua told the Judds at the Free Baptist Mission in Haiti did not necessarily correspond with what he told Moore later on. One possible scenario is that either Baquaqua did not have his facts straight or his editors simply did not know how to understand him. Another possible scenario is that Baquaqua deliberately manufactures a "story" or identity that he summons upon need—and if that were the case, then inevitably the official story would change.

Creating the Heroic Fugitive

The preface of the narrative offers revealing clues about the struggle for identity and belonging that foregrounds more complicated trajectories in the narrative. The preface presents Baquaqua in a commonplace discourse that does not necessarily stray far from conventions, but also addresses the sense of exceptionality that the narrative brings up. The notion of displacement becomes apparent in that Moore participates in a text whose purpose for its subject is to leave the nation in order to pursue missionary work:

The cherished object of Mahommah has been for a long time past, indeed ever since his conversion to christianity whilst at Hayti, to be enabled to return again to his native land, to instruct his own people in the ways of the gospel of Christ, and to be the means of their salvation, which it is to be hoped he will be able to accomplish ere long; in the meantime he has become a subject of the Queen of England, and is at present living under her benign laws and influence in Canada. stirring up the colored population and agitating for the abolition of slavery all over the world

(5-6)

Moore sees Baquaqua as a temporal subject, unconventional and atypical, who passes through one point to the next spreading the message of Christianity. The narrative, itself, reflects this sense of transition, transformation and religious fervor.

Moore presents Baquaqua as a familiar slave narrative subject who could garner attention and sympathy from other abolitionists. Highlighting this desire, Moore aims to provide “simply a compilation or narration of events happening in the life of the man himself who narrates them, and given without any figured speech, but in the plainest style

possible; all the phrases used are ‘familiar as household words’” (7). Moore does not try to recreate Moors and exotic hybrids; instead, he deploys something that Henry Louis Gates Jr. labels as “heroic fugitive” rhetoric, a type of genre exemplified by a runaway slave who finds Canada a site of refuge. Specifically, echoes of Josiah Henson appear in the preface—a figure who came to symbolize, according to Robin W. Winks, “the successive fugitive, the man who successfully settled in Canada and there won fame, if not fortune, and a permanent place in the history of the abolitionist struggle” (114).

In addition, Moore employs elements of the spiritual autobiography. Apparently, Baquaqua’s narrative rests on the symbolic representations of “sacred wit” based on Christian teleology. William Andrews argues that slave narrators charted a basic trajectory of freedom, showing an awakening of “their awareness of their fundamental identity with and rightful participation in logos, whether understood as reason and its expression in speech or as divine spirit” (7). Many abolitionists considered the fight against slavery as a sacred crusade where the slave narratives stand for “models of the act and impact of biblical appropriation on the consciousness of the black narrator as bearer of the Word” (Andrews 64). Consequently, Moore turns Baquaqua into a commodity who can enter difficult social, geographical, and religious terrain with his command of western Christian knowledge. In the preface, Moore writes:

If it should be the province of Mahommah to go out to Africa as a missionary, according to his heart's desire, it is his intention, if he is permitted to return to this country, to issue this work in a larger form, with the addition of matters that has either been entirely left out or curtailed for

want of space, together with his success amongst his native race, the people of his own clime.

In many ways, Moore views the narrative is about the redemptive quality of Christian abolitionism and its ability to transform subjects into bearers of the gospel.

Moore seemingly situates Baquaqua within existing forms and tropes in order to validate an “authentic” experience that was already determined by white abolitionist audiences. This section also witnesses the transference of African ideals and the amalgamation of Americans principles into a new concept that is ready to be exported to parts of Africa. Within this sense of newness, emerges an opaque zone that enables Baquaqua to mark a radical departure from the norm, and attempt to construct himself as a new type of missionary. At this stage, it is useful to examine the ethnological section and read how Baquaqua and Moore establish the interesting ontological foundation that will drive the narrative.

Native of Djougou

As shown, ethnology plays an important role in African Muslim slave narratives. Baquaqua’s narrative does not stray from this tradition and treads some of the same ground already covered in previous chapters of this dissertation. The ethnological section opens with Baquaqua describing a rich account of life, society and culture at Djougou or “Zoogoo, in Central Africa, whose king was the tributary to the King of Bergoo.”³³ There

³³Many scholars have attributed various cities and countries from West Africa as “Zoogoo.” Law and Lovejoy have narrowed down to two possible cities that might be Moore’s incorrectly spelled city: the city of Djougou or the city of Zougou, both of which are located in present day Benin. Considering that Baquaqua mentions “gatekeepers” in the narrative, it is likely that he is referring to the “chief wards of Djougou” (18).

is a tremendous effort to detail as many instances of African cultural, religious, and social practices to regulate the production of knowledge. Both Baquaqua and Moore use ethnology to authorize a type of surveillance of Africa, considering that “the foot of the white had not made its first impress upon the soil” (14).³⁴ Each word marks out a subject nation because “in Africa [meaning Djougou in this case] they have no written or printed forms of government” (11). In terms of agency, Baquaqua helps to establish the tone of the encounter as he writes his kingdom into a privileged American public space. He writes about the necessity for Christian intervention into the region, and the dire circumstances of certain ethnic groups who could be liberated from impoverished lives. The text also suggests the limitations of African knowledge: “Africa is rich in every respect (except in knowledge)” (28). Yet, this does not read simply as a colonial discourse about the depravity or limitations of African civilization. There is also the counter-hegemonic impulse to present a perspective that questions the virtues of western civilization. Baquaqua points out “the knowledge of the white man is needed, but not his vices” (28).

An important aspect of this persona is that Baquaqua comes from a diverse, multicultural background. Baquaqua states that his parents “were of different countries.” His father was a native of Borgu who claimed some Arabian descent. He was “not very dark complexioned.” Evidence from the letters and the biography suggests that his father

³⁴ Heinrich Klose, a German, was the first westerner to step foot into the city in the year 1890. What little researchers know about the city have to do with larger issues of Djougou’s association with the country of Borgu, which was east of the city. Both Djougou and Borgu were at the center of various trade routes, situated between two large African peoples, the Asante to the west, and the Sokoto Caliphate to the east. Of this region, there are some important accounts. Explorers like Hugh Clapperton, Richard and John Lander, Jacques Lombard, and John Duncan left important records about Borgu. Many of these materials can be used to verify partially the comments that Baquaqua made; however, they do not provide an adequate picture of Djougou, itself.

probably had ancestry from *shurfa*—a group of North Africans, probably Moroccans, involved in the merchant trade. By all accounts, his father was not initially successful as a merchant until he married Baquaqua's mother and then his fortunes turned considerably. Baquaqua's mother was “a native of Kashna” who possessed “a very dark complexion.” The family developed an important merchant business with ties to the trade between the Asante and Sokoto Caliphate. His father was a merchant and his mother's ancestral lineage traces to the merchant houses of Katsina (Law and Lovejoy 29).³⁵

Baquaqua does not state how he chooses to identify himself in terms of his African ethnically—an issue that will become important later as he navigates the various nationalities in his travels. Unfortunately, the biography and the letters that Judds provided to the American Baptist Society naturally tell two different stories. The Judds understood his ancestry to have been from Katsina. The letter reads: “he is from the city of Kashina, of the tribe Houssa.” Of course, the Judds might have simply misunderstood what Baquaqua explained, as their knowledge of Africa was limited. However, there is another interesting twist that might shed light on the differing stories: family relations. Baquaqua and his father did not get along. Evidence suggests that he might have chosen to identify with his mother's side of the family, and claimed a Hausa identity. Moreover, thanks to his association with the Muslims of Brazil, Baquaqua might have developed a bond with them and self-identified himself as a Hausa in light of his New World experiences. The narrative, unfortunately, is silent on this matter. Only Mr. Judd's letter

³⁵ Baquaqua also participated in this vital trade, learning the business delivering grain to the city of Gonja. For a short time, Baquaqua gained supplemental experiencing working for his uncle on his mother's side as a metal smith; while this seems tangential to the family business at first, the uncle had property in Sal-gar and often participated in the caravan route to Asante, which gave Baquaqua further experience of the trade (Baquaqua 27-28).

suggests that this self-identification might have to do with “his intercourse with other slaves from the same country.” This heritage sets the stage for his attempts to define a reliable symbol of cultural syncretism. He inscribes a type of cosmopolitan identity that celebrates his West African heritage and the potential for new forms of cultural syncretism in the west. As Lovejoy and Law note, this is a reminder that West African-born slaves in the Americas had “a choice among alternative ethnic identities” (25).

In matters of religion, the picture is a bit clearer; the family considered their faith in Islam seriously. The father “rose every morning at four o’clock for prayers, after which he returned to bed, at sunrise he performed his second devotional exercises, at noon he worshipped again, and again at sunset” (10). Baquaqua’s mother came from the Muslim Wangara; however, there is some question about her faith. According to the narrative, Baquaqua’s mother had “no religion at all” (26). She however seemed sympathetic to “Mahommedianism,” but “did not care much about the worshipping part of the matter” (26). Other family members were also religious. His oldest brother “was a staunch Mahomedan and well learned in Arabic” (27). Eventually, the brother earned an important position as a fortuneteller for the King of Djougou. An uncle was an “officiating priest” at various ceremonies during Ramadan. There is a good probability that this uncle was actually an Imam of a mosque.

This history does not suggest that Baquaqua conformed to the will of his family. Contrary to Austin’s assertions, Baquaqua was an intelligent person; however, he was not an ideal student in Africa, a victim of vices and alienation that drove him to unexpected directions. Moore writes that Baquaqua “did not progress very well in learning, having a natural dread of it” (26). There is perhaps some rationale for this considering the

problematic inter-family dynamic between his father and him. It seems that his father wanted him to be an Islamic scholar, but Baquaqua did not like “school very much,” frequently missed class and received beatings for his troublesome behavior. At some point, Baquaqua attempted to restart his studies, failed again, and he ran away from school. It is apparent that the intense discipline that Qur’anic studies required did not suit his temperament. Perhaps an overprotective mother who sought to defend him from the father might have given Baquaqua the wrong sense of what education meant.

His later life paints an exotic cosmopolitan landscape that would captivate the readership as they entered the unfamiliar world of the Islamic merchant class and the ultimately the decadent court of Djougou. When the uncle dies, Baquaqua’s mother inherits the tremendous fortune that she quickly uses to ransom a son from enslavement. Then she sends Baquaqua with some grain to another son who works as a valet for the King of Daboya. During this trip, Baquaqua becomes involved with local politics, and soon finds himself participating in a war against a border kingdom. The battle does not go well and develops into a rout for the opposing forces. Baquaqua and his companions are captured and suffer terribly from ravenous mosquitoes during their confinement. Only his brother’s intervention spares him the indignities of slavery. This adventure paves the way for the court of Djougou to notice him. Using some of his mother’s connections, he becomes a “Che-ro-coo, that is a kind of bodyguard for the king” (31). As Austin suggests, he worked as a “thug . . . working for a thug.” Baquaqua provides a picture of African degeneracy:

whilst he was there he became very wicked. But, (says he,) at that time, I scarce knew what wickedness was; the practises of the soldiers and

guards, I am now convinced, was very bad indeed, having full power and authority from the king to commit all kinds of depredations they pleased upon the people without fear of his displeasure or punishment. At all times, when they were bent on mischief, or imagined they needed anything, they would pounce upon the people and take from them whatever they chose, as resistance was quite out of the way, and useless, the king's decree being known to all the country round about. These privileges were allowed the soldiery in lieu of pay, so we plundered for a living.

At this stage, Baquaqua sets up the familiar tale of a wayward African official on the road to ruin, which consequently becomes a part of this ethnology. As if the narrative is not already complicated enough, Baquaqua enters into another set of stereotypical metaphors when he constructs the tale of a regal or highly important individual's fall into the clutches of western slavery. Clearly, Baquaqua is manipulating the boundaries of the spiritual autobiography in order to tell an unconventional tale of slavery and in the process assert his independent and heroic voice that enables him to criticize western hypocrisy.

African Journeys and Disruptions

Baquaqua's gradual transformation occurs following a night of heavy drinking, "to visit a strange king that I had never seen before" (35). Deterritorialization begins with a capture organized by various members of the court who had grown jealous of his relationship with the King of Djougou. The techniques of the capture evoke images of

traditional African warfare and slave codification: “in the morning when I arose, I found that I was a prisoner, and my companions were all gone. Oh, horror! I then discovered that I had been betrayed into the hands of my enemies, and sold for a slave” (35). The scene reads along the lines of its transformative vector, as a shift in trajectories away from what had been the center of his life, the mother: “never shall I forget my feelings on that occasion; the thoughts of my poor mother harassed me very much, and the loss of my liberty and honorable position with the king, grieved me very sorely” (35). The break is permanent as he enters transnational zones of travel and displacement.

Stuart Hall suggests that typically a displaced subject creates an “imaginary plenitude” where the dispossessed develops a desire to return to some beginning that “like the imaginary in Lacan . . . can neither be fulfilled nor acquired.” Considering that the text was composed a decade after his capture, one can confirm that once cultural exchange, violent or otherwise, has occurred, there can be no returning to that earlier moment of supposed innocence. In order to make sense of this experience, Baquaqua frames his departure from the continent of Africa and the figure of the mother using a similar rhetorical strategy. Consequently, much like the Lacanian subject, Baquaqua attempts to create paths “home” in some manner.

In one section, Baquaqua inserts an oddly phrased passage that highlights this sense of separation and dislocation:

the last ray seemed fading away, and my heart felt sad and weary within me, as I thought of my home, my mother! whom I loved most tenderly, and the thought of never more beholding her, added very much to my

perplexities. I felt sad and lonely, wherever I did roam, and my heart sank within me, when I thought of the “old folks at home.” (39)

Stephen Collins Foster’s song is a curious inclusion in the narrative and probably an innovation that can be attributed to Moore. The song’s themes, which DuBois would eventually consider the representational Negro song, explore questions of travel, sadness and the longing of childhood, the security of a family and parents. Perhaps more significant is the familiarity of a home. Movement from one socio-cultural space to another will keep Baquaqua a perpetual “foreigner,” an unhomey and unrooted outcast. This will not be the last time he uses the word “roam” to describe the violence of his movement. By drawing on the trauma of separation from his mother, Baquaqua focuses on a biblically inscribed moral order that equalizes the races, disrupts the western hierarchies of power and asserts the basic humanity of blacks:

Some persons suppose that the African has none of the finer feelings of humanity within his breast, and that the milk of human kindness runs not through his composition; this is an error, an error of the grossest kind; the feelings which animated the whole human race, lives within the sable creatures of the torrid zone, as well as the inhabitants of the temperate and frigid; the same impulses drive them to action, the same feeling[s] of love move within their bosom, the same maternal and paternal affections are there, the same hopes and fears, griefs and joys, indeed all is there as in the rest of mankind; the only difference is their color, and that has been arranged by him who made the world and all that therein is, the heavens, and the waters of the mighty deep, the moon, the

sun and stars, the firmament and all that has been [sic] made from the beginning until now, therefore why should any despise the works of his hands which has been made and fashioned according to his Almighty power, in the plenitude of his goodness and mercy.

O ye despisers of his works, look ye to yourselves, and take heed; let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall. (40)

Baquaqua seemingly places himself at the intersection of sentimental and protest literature. An ethos in the passage not only establishes legitimacy, but also the necessary foundation to challenge antagonistic interlocutors who supported the practice of slavery. Consequently, the removal from his “mother” grants him the necessary moral authority to criticize western racism and enables him to enter new types of political discourses. First, it is worth exploring the rhetoric that he uses in describing the African move to the coast and his poignant critiques of the west. This eventually leads us to understand his desire for agency on the Middle Passage.

Like Equiano, Baquaqua documents a journey of physical hardship from an African innocence to a depraved modernity located at the African coast. He considers his homeland a pre-civilized Eden—especially the region of Cham-mah where the grasslands strike him as beautiful and representative of an innate African dignity. He asserts the beauty of the continent and implores Americans to learn more: “the people of America do not know anything about tall grass, such as in Africa; the tall grass of the American prairies is as a child beside a giant, in comparison with the grass of the torrid zone” (37-38). He plays into transcendentalist traditions of idealizing a harmonious relationship with nature and echoes some of the sentiments that Emerson conveys in “Nature,”

suggesting that Africans can appreciate and desire to be served by nature and the love of Beauty. If the “Eden” metaphors are consistent, then Baquaqua claims that the “fall” of Africans is caused by the intervention of “sinning” westerners. We must draw allusions to Venture Smith who asked similar questions about the influence that the west had on Africa. He claims that contact with the west, living in a “Christian land,” actually did not result in moral uplift, but caused a type of moral bankruptcy. Baquaqua asks a similar question: was Africa the land of savagery or was western intervention actually destroying a paradise? For the most part, Baquaqua suggests that serious moral depravity is something located in the west and then exported to Africa—an interesting position considering his own complicated personal history with violence, alcohol and political corruption.

He provides many examples that show the negative effects of this exchange that take place in the contact zone between Africa and west. For instance, there is a mistrust of western civilization in the section documenting his march toward the city of Dahoma, which stands, like the man-eating leopards that had stalked the countryside, as a marker of foreboding, cultural transference and corruption—a city is known for “whiskey and the people were fond of dancing” (39). Dahomey or Dahoma stands at the borderlands, as suggested by the presence of diverse products, such as oranges. There are also the old symbols of death, where the king's house was “ornamented on the outside with human skulls.” While the conjunction of these images makes Baquaqua recognize that each new semantic encounter means a sundering from his past, as he “began to give up all hopes of ever getting back to my home again,” it also means standing at the threshold of cultural

erasure, and a making a perilous descent into a world of displacement and disjunction (39).

We can see some of this attitude further developed in the section describing his first contact with whites. Baquaqua's direct contact with the New World is framed along lines of death and despair and marks a symbolic movement of division from any notion of the "motherland." When Baquaqua enters the city of Gra-fe, and comes across his first white man, he confronts a world of unfamiliar signs. He first experiences the humiliating process of being branded, which symbolizes the violence of transformation from African subject to western object:

Whilst at this place, the slaves were all put into a pen, and placed with our backs to the fire, and ordered not to look about us, and to insure obedience, a man was placed in front with a whip in his hand ready to strike the first who should dare to disobey orders; another man then went round with a hot iron, and branded us the same as they would the heads of barrels or any other inanimate goods or merchandize. (41)

When he sees the slave ship, amazement overcomes him: "the ship was lying some distance off. I had never seen a ship before, and my idea of it was, that it was some object of worship of the white man." Considering his own epistemological foundations, Baquaqua views the color white and all the connotations associated with western civilization in terms of death: "we were all to be slaughtered, and were being led there for that purpose. I felt alarmed for my safety, and despondency had almost taken sole possession of me" (41). In this context, western civilization does not present itself as a paragon of moral and ethical behavior.

Faced with this knowledge, Baquaqua comes to understand the need for self-agency and responsibility on the Middle Passage. In *Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy writes about the concept of the ships on the Middle Passage, “Ships immediately focus attention on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artifacts: tracts, books, gramophone records, and choirs” (4). The ship transfers ideas, peoples, cultures while providing new contact zones where people and ideas are reinvented and transferred. Once on board, Baquaqua realizes that the ship not only moves people, but also ushers an exchange of ideas where conflicting epistemological systems meet and where contact zones develop to allow people to reinvent themselves. In this light, the earlier imaginary of death gives way to a life-affirming promise of resistance, symbolizing Baquaqua’s continued need to explore new avenues of expression. Often, as seen in the works of Equiano and other eighteenth-century slave narratives, African cultures and people transform and attempt to enter modernity on their own terms.³⁶ Baquaqua discovers a strategy of survival when he locates a seam within the power structure and decides to gather up “a little knowledge of the Portuguese” (45). As Frantz Fanon said, “to speak a language is to take on a world, a culture” (38). During the period between the ship’s reaching Brazil and subsequent unloading of the slave to the local slave markets, Baquaqua speaks with the black slave sailors who act as go-betweens and interpreters for slave masters. He gains some basic knowledge of the language that he uses to control his fate when eventually he reaches the auction block: “my master was a Portuguese I could comprehend what he wanted very well, and gave him to understand that I would do all he needed as well as I was able, upon which he appeared quite

³⁶ For a fuller discussion of this, please refer to *The Black Atlantic* by Paul Gilroy and *Pioneers of the Black Atlantic*, edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and William Andrews.

satisfied” (45). Baquaqua resolves that language acquisition is a necessary step to his survival.

This tactic marks a significant break from other African Muslim narrators who did not seem interested in learning the language of the local ruling class and chose to write themselves into complex displaced third zones. Instead, Baquaqua chooses to enter Brazilian culture and to negotiate his own terms. As the next section shows, he appropriates the “language” of the region and through clever subversion presents an alternative mode of agency, empowerment and manipulation that results in freedom.

Brazilian Slavery: Transformation, Transference and Trauma

When Baquaqua lands in Brazil, he adopts a strategy of transformation and becomes a *Mina*. As Law and Lovejoy suggest: “In 1844, the population of Pernambuco was 618,950, of whom 83,845 were slaves, and among the slaves only 22,233 were Africans (13,596 males and 8,637 females), of the people brought from Africa, it is unlikely that more than 10 per cent were from the Bight of Benin, and fewer still from the far interior” (43). Michael Gomez’s thorough study of the African Muslim diaspora of the New World notes that Muslims in Brazil were accorded special status from other black slaves. Generally, slaves from West Africa were called *Minas* and were considered poorly suited toward hard field work in the plantations; that particular job seemed more suited toward those from West Central Africa, “so-called Angolas or Bantus” who were “seen as docile and predisposed to agricultural labor as cultivators and mill operators” (Gomez 94). Muslims were urban and worked in domestic service. In addition to their cosmopolitan identity, these Muslims tended to be more inclined toward rebellion.

According to Kent in “African Revolt in Bahia,” the various Muslim groups of West Africa were viewed “either as mandingueiros, sorcerers capable of creating trouble, or as men of ‘non-Negroid’ features, somehow ‘whiter’ and ‘superior’ and ‘more intelligent’ than ‘the Pagan African’” (Kent 105; qtd in Gomez 95).³⁷

When it came to religion, many of the *Minas* were baptized upon reaching Brazilian shores, but did not abandon their native faith. Gomez suggests that the *Minas* and the moriscos of sixteenth century Spain shared many historical commonalities. It is interesting to note as well that many of these *Minas* decided to stay in Brazil after the abolishment of slavery in 1888 and maintained a community that lasted into the early part of the twentieth century. Typical of *Minas*, Baquaqua resists his master’s attempts to force him to pray as a Roman Catholic. Baquaqua describes the scene at the house:

His family consisted of himself, wife, two children and a woman who was related to them. He had four other slaves as well as myself. He was a Roman Catholic, and had family worship regularly twice a day, which was something after the following: He had a large clock standing in the entry of the house. We all had to kneel before them; the family in front, and the slaves behind. We were taught to chant. We also had to make the sign of the cross several times. Whilst worshiping, my master held a whip in his hand, and those who showed signs of inattention or drowsiness, were immediately brought to consciousness by a smart application of the whip. This mostly fell to the lot of the female slave, who would often fall asleep in spite of the images, crossings, and other like pieces of amusement.

³⁷ African Muslims were also instrumental in the 1835 Bahia Revolt. See Michael Gomez, *Black Crescent*, Chapter 3.

This moment depicts the old world despotism that distorts the “message” of the Christian faith. Baquaqua’s critique of Catholic colonialism would have not been lost to the American abolitionists who viewed Brazilian slavery as another global battleground in the attempt to abolish slavery completely. Specifically, he focuses on articulating his voice of dissent in exposing the horrors of the Brazilian slave trade that flourished during the 1840s and early 1850s. While legislation banned the trade in 1850, there were still slavers landing illegally as late as 1856 (Thomas *The Slave Trade* 744).³⁸ When he comes to worship, Baquaqua does not understand the nature of Catholic worship and seeks to express some type of resistance against the concept of forced conversion. Situating himself in a Protestant discourse, he considers worship in Catholicism as a type of submission not to God, but to the slave master’s authority. The chants are in a foreign language, the gestures are unfamiliar, and the clock belongs to a form of icon worship that was an anathema to Muslims. The master asserts his domination through keeping the slaves and probably his family as well, ignorant. The slaves mimic the worship, but feel nothing for the religion. Interestingly, Baquaqua never converts to Roman Catholicism.

Baquaqua confronts the brutality of the Brazilian slavery and attempts to manipulate the system by employing a strategy of accommodation that fails and forces him to resort to violence. For instance, he presents himself as an alternative to other slaves who generally drank and misbehaved: “my companions in slavery were not quite so steady as I was, being much given to drink, so that they were not so profitable to my master. I took advantage of this, to raise myself in his opinion, by being very attentive and obedient” (46). Baquaqua manages to improve his language skills and enters a path

³⁸ In 1850, the Brazilian government under heavy pressure from the British signed legislation that would make slave ships liable for seizure and have their captains tried as pirates. This effectively signaled the beginning of the end of the trade.

of upward mobility that enables him to gain relative autonomy from the household as he sells bread away from the home. However, he also suffers severe beatings from his owner and eventually becomes “unfaithful and indolent” to force a sale. Reading Baquaqua’s narrative reminds us of the differences between American and Brazilian slavery. As Carl N. Degler explains, “in Brazil . . . more important than race in differentiating between men was legal status. The mere fact that a man was a Negro or a mulatto offered no presumption that he would identify with slaves” (Degler 84). Perhaps because Brazilian culture did not necessarily fear a freed black man, there was the possibility for freedom or at the very least the potential for a slave to change owners. Of course, such change was not easily accomplished, something that Baquaqua discovers when he must follow a course of action that leads to his near self-destruction because he would rather “die than live to be a slave.” This is not an empty threat, especially considering the historical work by Degler showing that there was a high suicide rate among Brazilian slaves (72).³⁹ Nonetheless, Baquaqua is eventually placed on the auction block and his strategy works.

This section is problematic because Baquaqua confronts questions of cultural hegemony. He describes blacks repeating the practice of owning slaves: “a colored man there who wanted to buy me, but for some reason or other he did not complete the purchase” (47-48). In his role as exhorter and critic, Baquaqua articulates the ambiguities inherent within the discourse of ownership and power:

I merely mention this fact to illustrate that slaveholding is generated in power, and any one having the means of buying his fellow creature with the paltry dross, can become a slave owner, no matter his color, his creed

³⁹ At one point, he tries to drown himself, but is rescued

or country, and that the colored man would as soon enslave his fellow man as the white man, had he the power. (47-48)⁴⁰

On board the ship of his new owner, Captain Jose da Casa, Baquaqua recognizes that he is trapped within a system that makes him complicit in his own oppression. At first, he appropriates a familiar strategy of accommodation and becomes “acquainted with the crew and the rest of the slaves, I got along pretty well.” After a short period, he is promoted to “the office of under-steward” (48). Eventually, after the captain and steward have a falling out, Baquaqua assumes the important keys of the ship: “I did all in my power to please my master, the captain, and he in return placed confidence in me” (48). Yet, there are limitations to this type of onboard mobility. After surviving two Atlantic hurricanes, Baquaqua reaches an important conclusion about his future:

Whilst in the doubtful position of whether we should be lost or not, it occurred to me that death would be but a release from my slavery, and on that account rather welcome than otherwise. Indeed I hardly dared to care either way. I was but a slave, and I felt myself to be one without hope or prospects of freedom, without friends or liberty. I had no hopes in this world and knew nothing of the next; all was gloom, all was fear. The present and the future were as one, no dividing mark, all Toil! Toil!! Cruelty! Cruelty!! No end but death to all my woes. (49)

Baquaqua finally resists his captain during a trip to New York, framed in the context of a drunken assault on the Brazilian slave system, complete with its clear criticism of the hemispheric condition of slavery. After a nasty fight, which results in

⁴⁰ Austin tends to credit Moore with this section. However, Lovejoy and Law argue that it is entirely likely that Baquaqua could have relied upon his African experiences to reach this conclusion.

Baquaqua receiving many horrid wounds, he creates a sanctuary in the bow of the ship— heading “underground,” to borrow a metaphor from Ralph Ellison, in order to coax out an existence not perturbed by the oppressing class. In short, he occupies a temporary liminal space between masters and working slaves. We can read Baquaqua manipulating the boundaries of power and draw a connection to “Benito Cereno” and to the ritual staging of authority Herman Melville explores in this story. While Baquaqua does not assume complete control of the ship like Atufal and Babo, he does manage to disrupt the order of the ship in a complex performance that reverses temporarily the power structure. The captain attempts to restore his authority and sends “good victuals from his own table, no doubt to conciliate me after the cruel wrongs he had inflicted on me, but that was in vain” (53). Baquaqua engages in guerrilla warfare and “was not in any great hurry to get to work again, as he frequently, previous to this, caused me to be flogged for not doing what it would have taken any three men to have done, so that I now felt inclined that he should do without any further services altogether” (53).

Despite using violence here, Baquaqua seems to back away from advocating any systematic aggressive resistance. In the following section, which is worth citing in its entirety, Baquaqua returns to the rhetoric of Christian salvation and deploys metaphors of redemption. This has long term ramifications in the way he chooses to confront American modernity as he argues that God should be the final judge of the earthly white kings:

His captain did a great many cruel things which would be horrible to relate; he treated the female slaves with very great cruelty and barbarity; he had it all his own way, there were none to take their part; he was for the time “monarch of all he surveyed;” “king of the floating house,” none

dared to gainsay his power or to control his will. But the day is coming when his power will be vested in another, and of his stewardship he must render an account; alas what account can he render of the crimes committed upon the writhing bodies of the poor pitiless wretches he had under his charge, when his kingship shall cease and the great account is called for; how shall he answer? And what will be his doom?--That will only be known when the great book is opened. May God pardon him (in his infinite mercy) for the tortures inflicted upon his fellow creatures, although of a different complexion. (53-54)

Baquaqua treads carefully here for he does not want to present himself as a revolutionary. Instead, he asserts God's dominion over all creations and detracts from his need to resort to violence, which reconfigures him within the tenets of spiritual redemption. What results is that Baquaqua will not escape from the ship with his fists, but from a rational deployment of western Logos, a strategy that he briefly adopted on the Middle Passage and then perfects on the journey to New York.

Baquaqua and other slaves on board recognize a clear connection between literacy and empowerment: "the first words of English that my two companions and myself ever learned was F-r-e-e; we were taught it by an Englishman on board, and oh! how many times did I repeat it, over and over again" (54). Although African Muslim narratives generally do not employ literacy as a path toward "being," this instance shows that there is a unique (for this particular genre) contextualization with Frederick Douglass, Thomas Smallwood, William Wells Brown, Moses Grandy, and others who articulated what Henry Louis Gates considers the "direct relationship between freedom and discourse"

(Figures 311). While Gates, and those follow his lead, interpret the power of literacy within an Enlightenment framework that equates literacy with humanity, Derrida's notion of the speaking voice illustrates more clearly the power of language for Baquaqua. In *Speech and Phenomena*, Jacques Derrida shows, "the subject does not have to pass forth beyond himself to be immediately affected by his [own speaking voice.] My words are 'alive' because they seem not to leave me: not to fall outside me, outside my breath, at a visible distance; not to cease to belong to me, to be at my disposition without further props" (76). This moment of enunciation gives Baquaqua the illusion of command. He employs the English language within the authoritative lingual space of Portuguese, producing a double move of difference and assimilation. The articulation of the word produces identification with American ideals of freedom and allows him to experience new modes of inscription and negotiation that has him redefining the ordered signs on board the ship: "this same man told me a great deal about New York City, (he could speak Portuguese). He told me how the colored people in New York were all free, and it made me feel very happy, and I longed for the day to come when I should be there" (54). When the Lembranca docks in New York in 1847, the captain orders the crew not to speak anyone who comes onboard, but Baquaqua and several others articulate their desire to be "F-r-e-e" to the sympathetic New York Harbor captain who was a member of the New York Vigilance Society, an abolitionist group that rescued slaves from New York bound ships. This act of linguistic resistance results in an escape and then a lengthy legal battle that Lovejoy and Law chronicle in detail.⁴¹

⁴¹ The slaves spent many months dealing with the New York Judiciary system. At some point, they return to the ship and then escape again. The case captivates the New York press for quite some time.

While language is a crucial aspect of Baquaqua's creative resistance, the narrative also presents its limitation because "freedom" is not something readily available to slaves and they must constantly pursue it through the discovery of new trajectories of movement and expression. After Baquaqua escapes the shackles of the slave ship, he confronts the reality of slave discourse and discovers that its social, historical and economic dimensions often snare slaves. In the words of Harriet Jacobs, the closest that a slave can reach is "something akin to freedom." Baquaqua writes the following description of his harrowing escape:

Whilst we were again locked up, some friends who had interested themselves very much in our behalf, contrived a means by which the prison-doors were opened whilst the keeper slept, and we found do difficulty in passing him, and gaining once more "the pure air of heaven," and by the assistance of those dear friends, whom I shall never forget, I was enabled to reach the city of Boston (56)

Unfortunately, the city of Boston, complete with its promise of revolutionary freedoms, does not represent a safe-zone and he must confront his status as a fugitive. The abolitionist group allows him to make a choice: "when it was arranged that I should either be sent to England or Hayti, and I was consulted on the subject to know which I would prefer, and after considering for some time, I thought Hayti would be more like the climate of my own country and would agree better with my health and feelings" (56). Since America fails in its promise of liberty, he must choose a symbolic return to his home, Africa, through a proxy Haiti. There is of course more at stake here than simply a return to a proxy "home."

One is reminded of George Bancroft's remarks that "Hayti, the first in America that received African slaves, was the first to set the example to African liberty" (qtd. in Sundquist 137). During the 1840s and 1850s, there was a growing awareness in abolitionist thinking that emigration to Africa or Haiti could be potentially a feasible alternative for blacks disenfranchised in the United States. Many black leaders considered Haiti as a powerful example of the potential of black liberation. Specifically, James T. Holly, one the era's most outspoken proponents of emigration to Haiti, believed that the island had not reached its full potential and attempted to carry Christian doctrines to Haiti to transform it into a bastion of black nationhood. In this case, because of the circumstances that displace him, Baquaqua's narrative must negotiate the contradictory terrain of American ideals and society and consider Haiti a temporary bastion of hope and liberation.

The Spectacle of Haiti: Degeneration, Regeneration and Ambivalence

The narrative reveals a much starker picture of Haiti than presented in the idealism of Holly. Baquaqua discovers the limitations of local rule after he becomes a guest of the state. One of the Emperor's Generals, De Pe, gives him food and a place to sleep in the stables: "the mosquitoes tormented me very much—they teased me awfully" (57). More disconcerting is that the general offers Baquaqua "whiskey and brandy to drink" (57). This irresponsible act sets off a chain reaction of events whereby Baquaqua becomes a drunken transient who "went about from house to house." Without status or hope, he finds himself "a stranger in a strange land," who cannot speak "one word of the

language of the people” (57). Quickly, Haiti becomes a site of linguistic and cognitive disjunction.

Baquaqua experiences alienation and deteriorates as he “slept in the streets for several nights and became sick” (58). There is no sympathy from those with whom he could not communicate: “when I walked about I was thought to be drunk, as my head was dizzy from the weakness of my system. In this way I went from house to house, and the people could not understand, but thought I was drunk (57-58). Glissant makes the point that not having a “language” or having a partially learned one makes it impossible to relate with others who are socially different. In many ways, the lack of a language means a lack of self. There is a lack of equilibrium, a type of disconnect from the grounding of community. Baquaqua is the metaphorical madman speaking a tongue that no one could understand. This is a significant moment because he points out the irony of the black man still being displaced even in a supposed place of freedom and “home.” As he stands at the margins of Haitian society as an outcast, he declares in a climactic moment, “I became again an outcast and wanderer” (57). With the apparent failure of the Haitian government to protect its guest, governmental officials can only pass the incoherent Baquaqua to the Free Baptist Society.⁴²

Baquaqua inscribes a strong desire to acclimate to his new Christian surroundings and to negotiate what would have been a hostile epistemological tradition. The Judds place him on the road to recovery and in the process provide him with a western style

⁴² Since the Protestant Mission had not found a warm welcome in Haiti, the Judds take in Baquaqua in hopes of reversing their fortunes. Initially a part of the Free Will Baptist Movement, the mission broke away from the parent group over the issue of abolitionism. The mission was noted for its liberal and non-discriminatory practices, such as working with Native American groups, and helping fugitive African American slaves on the Underground Railroad. Another important aspect of the mission’s philosophy was education. They set up the New York Central College in 1849 that would play an important role in helping to spread liberal ideals in the northeast.

education in Christian thought. Although the details of this education are missing from the narrative, the archival evidence shows a very eager Baquaqua hoping to learn. Mrs. Judd writes, “he expresses a very strong desire to obtain an education . . . He very eagerly embraces every opportunity to read; and among us all, he manages to get several lessons into a day, generally” (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 48). Apparently, Baquaqua chooses to rest in that middle space between American colonizer and the African colonized, resorting to an “uneven, yet symbiotic relationship” where he discovers that he can appropriate the basis of a Christian education (Pedersen 225). This site of contact and transformation provides him an opportunity to pursue a new course of action and to take direct responsibility for his own life.

Determining the sincerity of Baquaqua’s conversion raises some problems. As shown in previous chapters, there was already a rich tradition of African Muslim slaves faking their conversion to Christianity.⁴³ Historical evidence suggests that Baquaqua secretly maintained an Islamic outlook and attempted to maintain the primacy of Allah’s authority. Unfortunately, Baquaqua’s connection to Islam is much more difficult to trace and we are left simply with fragmented documents and testimony that allude to his

⁴³ While conversion comes suddenly in the text, Baquaqua did foreshadow this turn toward Christianity. Earlier, on his journey to Haiti, Baquaqua encountered a fellow black sailor, Jones, who instructed him in the “correct ideas of things which I had formed the most absurd notion of” (57). Much of the instruction centered on Christian metaphors of shadows/light, life/death, heaven/hell. Baquaqua admits that “his explanation of this shadow puzzled me very much, but the solution of the mystery pleased me, and I began to feel proud of my learning” (57). Jones represents a paradigm of thought upon which Baquaqua can model himself. Both are wanderers without homes, both find each other on the Atlantic and both have constructed identities based on displacement and diaspora.

sympathies to his native religion.⁴⁴ There were additional reasons, as well. The Haitian government had been conscripting men for military service. Baquaqua felt threatened by military service, and wanted to secure passage out of the country. There was also the reality that Baquaqua had not been able to fit anywhere. It seems that he figured out that Africa might be the best place for him. Consequently, going home meant further incorporation within the mission's religion. Nevertheless, there was an active desire to adapt to modernity. As Baquaqua writes in a letter: "I want to go to the United States very much, and go to school and learn to understand the Bible very well" (231).

While it is difficult to determine where Moore's overwriting begins, we can read an internalization of Christian rhetoric in Baquaqua that enables us to recognize that there is what Lovejoy and Law suggest as "ambivalence" about the authenticity of the conversion, enabling us to read a syncretism in Baquaqua's approach that not only challenges the terrain of the Christian conversion narrative, but also continues to problematize the identity that he constructs. The following sections show that Baquaqua seemingly uses a type of camouflage to manufacture an identity that allows him to blend into the demands and expectations of abolitionist discourse. Within this new political

⁴⁴ The problem was that Baquaqua's conversion and intellectual abilities raised questions with the mission society. Much like Omar ibn Said, Baquaqua appropriated "parts" of the religion rather than subscribed to its whole. During the trip to Haiti, for instance, Baquaqua had tried to tell Jones about his religion and claimed, according to the Judds: "His God is Allah." When Jones discussed temperance, the letter suggests that "when Mr. Jones explains to him the object of our Temperance Pledge, he expressed himself very ready to have his name attached to it." In this case, given Islam's prohibition against alcohol, the Judds were probably just reminding Baquaqua of a basic tenet of Islam rather than steering him toward any notions of Christian salvation. In one instance, Baquaqua has a discussion with a Spanish Roman Catholic in Haiti and dismisses the crucifix as a product of icon worship. According to the Judds, he says: "this God wood, eh? . . . Well you take e little wood—make a God—go pray for God, eh? . . . Oh! Your God not say e nothing . . . O Mr. _____ very bad, [to] have wooden God. God not like it" (qtd. in Law and Lovejoy 52). Perhaps the clearest instance of Baquaqua clinging to his faith is found in a letter that he wrote to James Monroe Whipple of the American Missionary Society where he inserts the following Arabic words: "Allah, Allah, most ever" and the *Bismallah*: "In the name of Allah, most benevolent, ever-merciful" (qtd. in Austin *Transatlantic* 169).

discourse, Baquaqua transforms into a student of western modernity, and presents with a sense of irony and alienation the limitations that blacks encountered.

American Camouflage: the Unhomed Illusion

The New York section shows Baquaqua using camouflage as a strategy of resistance. The driving force here is not simply to become a “model former slave,” but to undermine this construct, turn against it in order to open new possibilities. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, Lacan draws from Roger Caillois’s important essay, “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia,” to argue that camouflage does not mean “hiding,” but represents an act of transformation: “Mimicry reveals something in so far as it is distinct from what might be called an *itself* that is behind. The effect of mimicry is camouflage, in the strictly technical sense. It is not a question of harmonizing with the background but, against a mottled background, of becoming mottled” (*Concepts* 99). In many ways, the adaption of camouflage is simply a means, not an end. As Deleuze and Guattari explain in slightly different context, when explaining the simulacra: “in order to become apparent, [a thing or object] is forced to simulate structural states and to slip into states of forces that serve it as masks. . . . underneath the mask and by means of it, it already invests the terminal forms and the specific higher states whose integrity it will subsequently establish” (*Anti-Oedipus* 91). Choosing this type of camouflage requires immersing himself in an environment of self-censorship, cautious surveillance, and voluntary submission.

He constantly erects and deconstructs facades. At some point during their passage to New York, the ship encounters rough weather and the passengers worry that the ship

might sink. In this fearful setting, Baquaqua explains how passages of the Bible alleviate their fears: “we had prayers aboard, but we did not fear the raging of the sea, as our trust was in Him ‘who resteth the sea, and stilleth the tempest.’” Then Baquaqua recounts how he becomes a bastion of strength and protector to Mrs. Judd: “My mistress was very fond of me, and said she did not feel at all uneasy as long as Mahommah was near her. She had great confidence in me, not that I could have saved her in case of wreck, but I suppose she felt more at rest knowing me, and that I had been about her so long, and served her faithfully” (60). This description of strength plays into tropes of the powerful black body and manipulates the sentimentalized tropes of stereotyping typically found in anti-slavery discourse. It also initiates a type of coming into black male hood that conveys the poise, bravery, and discipline of Biblical figures and prophets.

We can read further this sense of empowerment when Baquaqua befriends a seaman prone to drinking. The following story is worth presenting because it highlights the contradictory sense of racism that he experiences:

On the following day, one of the seamen who had professed great friendship for me during the voyage, took it into his head to turn ugly with me. As he was about going ashore, I merely said to him, “give my respects to your wife,” as he had been so kind to me. What I said was intended merely as a little civility, when as (I found afterwards) he had been drinking. He took it completely amiss, called me a “nigger,” and swore he would give me a thrashing. (61)

Clearly, the passage suggests that Baquaqua uses irony to assume the higher moral ground at the expense of the degenerate sailor who embodies the worst of western

culture. However, there are longer lasting ramifications with the encounter as Baquaqua confronts the sailor at some later point. The sailor was drunk and “behaved with great violence, swearing that he would break my head with a stick which he flourished about over my head” (61). He refused to sit “down with a ‘nigger.’” Baquaqua eventually calms the sailor who “sat down and ate like a Christian.” We must note the use of understatement. As Butterfield notes, “anything he [a slave] can say is bound to understate the point; it is an inevitable rhetorical method” (73). Interestingly, Baquaqua reveals that there is more to the matter and explains that “not till I had let him see a little of my own ugliness, and had threatened to beat him, that he became quieted; when he saw I was no longer to be played with, he gave in, and became a good man, only because he was obliged to” (61). Much like Frederick Douglass fighting Covey to assert his manhood, Baquaqua must reach the limitations of “turning the other cheek,” and resort to violence (or the threat) in order to earn his place in the world. This act of agency clearly contradicts his earlier pronouncement, following the violent episode with the Brazilian captain, of leaving matters to God.

Apparently, there is some type of camouflage being used that drifts between emotion and reason. It is important to state that historical justifications for racism and slavery by whites centered on the notion that blacks were emotional beings who could not be regulated by the boundaries of reason. Baquaqua challenges and manipulates this contention by showing his ability to maneuver between two extremes, often relying upon a wide repertoire of identities that he had manufactured and appropriated. Baquaqua explains his “reasoning:”

I followed out the Scripture injunction, to be as “wise as serpents, and harmless as doves,” not at all intending to beat him, merely to quiet him. My wisdom I displayed in the first place, not needing to display any other spirit than an harmless one; in the second, I found my “wisdom” sufficient for the case at that time. (61)

In a sense, he uses a type of linguistic resistance to criticize western culture as he marks the shift from living a life of violence to pursuing a path of wisdom, which becomes a sign of his transformation into a New World subject governed by the realms of Christian reason.

Understanding the telos of Christian thought enables him to join the abolitionist circuit and articulate his unusual story. Unfortunately, there is not much information about his activities during this period or any substantial details about the type of speeches he delivered. Most likely, considering his status as a “converted Muslim,” he would have attracted interest from members wanting to export their ideologies to the “Orient.” Timothy Marr describes how “Islam was figured within the powerful intellectual tradition of biblical eschatology and how this prophetic discourse affected the views and success of the first Protestant missionaries to Muslim lands” (10). A tenet of American abolitionism was that any society that condoned slavery was an “infidel and soul-denying system” (150). This enabled abolitionists to equate the horror of American slavery “with Muslim lands” and through the “process of imaginative alchemy” “chastised Americans for imitating such a reprehensible practice” (150). In light of such a discourse, Baquaqua’s presence proved highly successful in raising the necessary funds for the mission and ultimately for himself to enter college.

At this stage, the narrative veers in an unexpected direction that shows Baquaqua struggling to gain an education and confronting the ugly realities of American racism. In many ways, this is not a classic “success” story, but a guarded indictment against American racism that shows him making a success of himself not because of America, but in spite of America. The rhetorical strategy here first hinges on drawing indirect allusions to the struggles that slaves faced in the south in gaining their literacy. Baquaqua then appropriates and configures this trope as he presents himself as a student wanting to seek knowledge who is stymied by unsympathetic whites. He accuses American culture for condoning a double standard that seemingly wants to liberate Africans, yet does not want them to achieve and succeed in any meaningful way:

Whilst at college, some of the young gentleman there who did not altogether like my color, played considerable many practical jokes upon me, and tried to make me some mischief with the principals. They played all sorts of tricks upon me; they would, when I was out of the way, scatter my books and papers all over the room, and pile up my books in a heap; they would also choke up my stove pipe with shavings, so that when I attempted to make a fire, the room would become filled with smoke; but of these matters, I had only to complain in the right quarter, and all would be settled. But I did not like to be continually complaining of them, so I endured a great deal of their vexatious tricks in silence. I could not tell why they plagued me thus, excepting they did not like my color, and that they thought I was a good subject upon which to expend their frolicksome humor. (63)

Baquaqua tries to complete his courses, but cannot continue beyond his third year. The narrative does not provide many details: “I remained nearly three years in the college, and during that time made very great progress in learning, before leaving the college” (62). Law and Lovejoy show the English language remains a problem for Baquaqua. Members of the Society deem that Baquaqua would make a better fundraiser than a student. However, Baquaqua’s involvement with a white woman causes a minor scandal from which he has to extract himself. The situation turns so bad that he cannot attend church at Freetown Corners. He writes to George Whipple: “I have to be careful, I don’t go out much . . . I have a great trouble with these wickit [sic] people” (244). These setbacks make Baquaqua realize that the United States does not offer African Americans the opportunity to succeed.

Baquaqua ends up having to rely upon his own sense of agency again. He maintains his desire to learn, and asserts that: “After I left the college, I went to the Free Missions, with whom I remained a short time, and received more learning from that source. I went to school at Freetown Corner, under the direction of the missions” (63). However, this opportunity for advancement, which in many ways is a critical foundation of many slave narratives, presents him with eventual limitations that he cannot surmount. He accepts that without support from his sponsors, he must make his own way to Canada in order to raise the funds he needs. Baquaqua can no longer sustain his desire for reform and decides to leave, recognizing that travel and mobility offer him more potential.

Intermezzo: Crossing Boundaries, Borders and Nations

The crossing into Canada plays into the traditional motifs of the slave narrative. It represents not only the end of the line on the Underground Railroad, but the promise of entering a more sophisticated culture that did not define itself through rigid racial divisions. Canada also offers the possibility for economic success. It means abandoning the failed promise of American democracy and becoming a subject of the Queen of England: “[I] determined to become a subject of her Majesty, for which purpose I attended at the proper office, gave the oath of allegiance, and procured my papers of naturalization without any difficulty” (64). Perhaps more interestingly in terms of identity of formation and movement, he comes to the point where he begins to transverse various national identities and establishes a diasporic, unrooted identity. This path, though, is fraught with incertitude and displacement.

The narrative does not present a complete picture of his travels; fortunately, the collected personal letters offer some insight on his activities. Baquaqua employs his vast experiences to speak on the various abolitionist circuits of Chatham; however, he does not find success. Canada does not mean permanence—instead, he continues to find failure, dejection and hostility. In many ways, Haiti and Canada produce similar types of dislocation and alienation. He discovers a sense of exile that leaves him a wanderer, lost in the abolitionist environment. One is reminded of the “nomadic” trajectory. Deleuze and Guattari explain in a different context, “a path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own. The life of the nomad is the intermezzo” (380). For instance, Baquaqua attempts to link up with an alternative missionary group, the American Missionary

Association, led by George Whipple. The group had been funding the Mendi Mission, led by George Thompson. Baquaqua applies various times, citing his knowledge of Dendi, Arabic and English as something valuable to the mission. Law and Lovejoy note that the mission does not seem interested in Baquaqua's services—specifically concerned that Baquaqua had approached the group without the permission of his Baptist sponsors. In short, Whipple and others feel uneasy about Baquaqua's boldness, despite the fact that he had already begun to disassociate from the group.

Around this period, Baquaqua publishes his narrative to draw interest in his attempts to return to Africa. Although he receives adequate funding to publish the narrative, and manages to copyright his work, he cannot succeed setting up the mission in Africa. There is a long, detailed account provided by Law and Lovejoy that covers Baquaqua's falling out with the Free Baptist Society that does not have to be explained here. There is one interesting side note about the political battles that Baquaqua experiences that should be briefly mentioned. At the end of the narrative, there is an anonymous poem entitled "Prayer of the Oppressed." In itself, the poem is not worthy of close critical inquiry. Its author and purpose are far more interesting. Research has uncovered that James Monroe Whitfield was the author of the piece. This complicates matters because Whitfield had been engaged in debates with Frederick Douglass during this period over the issue of African American emigration to Africa. It is apparent that Baquaqua had lent his name in some manner toward the cause of the American Colonization Society—helping to explain why the Free Baptist Society did not wholeheartedly support the publication of the narrative. Nonetheless, it shows Baquaqua making the necessary political decisions to affect his own destiny instead of simply waiting for the Free Baptist society to assist him.

Baquaqua finds himself recognizing that the promise of North American liberty cannot be fulfilled. He eventually leaves Canada to travel to England. Unfortunately, we do not know much about his activities and if he succeeds in returning to Africa. Instead, what remains is a mystery. This is significant because Baquaqua presents his life in constant transition, living what Deleuze would consider living in “intermezzo.” Baquaqua fits this mold partially because he never manages to reach an end point in his tribulations, whether it is completing his education, finding a stable home, or finding permanent employment once he is emancipated after spending decades in slavery. While Baquaqua’s return or desire to return to Africa only opens more questions and problems, the narrative stands as an unconventional document of transitions and passages that accounts for complicated ongoing negotiations of self that expand our understanding of the multilayered nature of the African diaspora.

The narrative rests at a complex moment of cultural hybridity that problematizes the traditional conversion narrative and slave narrative. Baquaqua does not engage in the harmonization or repression of difference, but employs and manipulates a form of diasporic identity creation. Although Baquaqua is the subject of western appropriation, created in the image of his various masters and sponsors, he disrupts these “captures” through construction of complex hybrid identities that enable him to freely shift allegiances, not assume any type of permanent identity as he adopts various types of genres, and write himself into western modernity mostly on his own terms. Ultimately, he creates temporary identities in his desires and maneuvers to negotiate his sense of self. In the next chapter, we find another African Muslim making a similar trajectory in the *Autobiography of Nicholas Said*.

Chapter 5: Transnational Trajectories and Displacement: Examining Transnational Pathways in the *Autobiography of Nicholas Said*

In *The Autobiography of Nicholas Said*, Nicholas Said, an African born world traveler, claims that “My honest and ardent desire is to render myself useful to my race wherever it may be. I have no aspirations for fame, nor anything of the sort. But I shall always prefer at all times to find myself in the midst of the most ignorant of my race, and endeavor to teach the rising generation the advantages of education” (212). Apparently, he writes about racial uplift in the tradition of Frederick Douglass, David Dorr and William Wells Brown. In order to express this message, Said does not inscribe a traditional slave narrative, but chooses the unconventional genre of the travelogue. Unfortunately, the buying public did not seem sympathetic toward his work—perhaps his message that Africans could elevate themselves if left alone and given the proper education did not resonate with his intended audience. The narrative disappeared for close to a century until being discovered by Precious Rasheeda Muhammad.

The narrative offers an alternative vision of how some blacks used travel to enter privileged western social and mobile spaces. One cursory examination of the narrative reveals that Said does not fit in a tradition of travel writing dominated by Anglo-American writers like Richard Burton, Bayard Taylor, and Mark Twain. Generally, travelers are Western individuals, usually males of adequate fiscal means, white, introspective, knowledgeable of arts and science, and humanists.⁴⁵ They concern themselves with examining European culture and exploring “exoticism or Christian pity when writing about the Orient or Africa” (Schueller x). These figures traveled the Middle

⁴⁵ See Mary Louise Pratt *Imperial Eyes* and Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel*.

East and Africa and helped to mark the boundaries of western imperialism and otherness for an interested American reading public. Said's narrative requires us to ask new questions about the roles that black Africans and African Muslims played in forming American perceptions of travel.

Said recognizes that a mobile subject, a type of black citizen of the world, has the power to manipulate normative boundaries for African Americans in the United States. An important aspect of this type of identity is the ability to perform and appropriate the regime of gentility for his own political and social agenda. He presents a model of self-empowerment that draws as much from African-American leaders like Frederick Douglass and William Wells Brown as it does from African Muslim leaders like El-Kanemy and Barca Garna. Subsequently, Said constructs a narrative around his experiences at the crossroads between three civilizations—African, Islamic, and European—and depicts a life, to borrow a concept from James Clifford, of an participant-observer who enters new cultures and documents their customs and beliefs while at the same time interrogating the legitimacy of western imperial discourses that minimize the accomplishments of nonwhites. This chapter explores the trajectories upon which Said travels, examines the nature of his ethnological-historical maneuvers to alter white perceptions of the spaces that he inhabits, and analyzes the various rhetorical strategies that he uses to overcome doctrines and ideologies of inferiority and that allow him to fashion an identity based on a type of transnational activism.

Displaced Gentility: Shedding Light, Opening Doors

Said enters a crowded field of Anglo-American travel writers during the nineteenth century. According to Malini Johar Schueller, one common element that connected travelers writing about Europe was a desire to perform a “ritual of cultural affirmation and affiliation” (xxi). She uses the work by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to argue that the “acquisition of European cultural capital and the writing about enchantment with this culture was thus preeminently a class privilege marking aristocratic heredity and taste and moral and civic virtue, rather than economic means alone” (xxii). Anglo-American travelers to the Orient wrote from the perspective of a superior moral position and according to Schueller, depicted images “about the backward and passive, though exotic, Orient” (xxiii). These writers also maintained a tone of gentility in their interactions with a white cosmopolitan audience. They often assumed a rhetorical style that presented them as classed, erudite and refined. As Christopher Mulvey writes in his classic work on travel-writers, as presented in Schueller’s introduction of David Dorr: “The writer-travelers were therefore obliged to adopt a tone of voice which suggested very often they were of higher social standing than that to which their actual social incomes or birth might otherwise entitle them” (Mulvey 7; Schueller xxiii).

Nineteenth-century African-American travel writers, however, wrote for different reasons and from different social positions as either servants or members of an entourage. Relying upon the work by Mary Louise Pratt, Clifford writes that European travelers moved generally within “highly determine circuits” which are located “on specific itineraries dictated by political, economic, and intercultural global relations” that do not

“offer any simple equivalence with other immigrant and migrant laborers” (34-35).

African American writers did not usually earn the privilege of being “travelers.”

Nonetheless, African Americans wrote travel narratives to critique aspects of American cultural, social or economic practices. They frequently attacked American chattel slavery and voiced the “sense of empowerment they felt at being treated without contempt in Europe” (xxiv). Those who wrote about Europe, like Frederick Douglass, attempted to validate their new identities through “access to manners and class.” Those who traveled to the Orient and Africa often modified the Anglo-American tradition to criticize American values and treatment of black slaves. Ultimately, travel writing allowed African-Americans to enter a privileged mobile social space and to access new modes of being.

Unlike most “American” writers, Said was a product of an African society who earned his western cultural capital after experiencing slavery in three continents. From this unconventional perspective, he is a hybrid figure who combines an African epistemology, European genteel tradition and an American self-determinism. While he offers ethnological information about the regions he visits, he also intervenes in established western discourses in order to control and subvert them. In the preface of the narrative, he equates mobility with the potential of the African mind: “My motive in this publication I believe to be good: a desire to show the world the possibilities that may be accomplished by the African, and the hope that my humble example may stimulate some at least of my people to systematic efforts in the direction of mental culture and improvement” (v). He manipulates the normative strategies of a privileged genteel expression of leisure and instead presents his “egotism” as a symbol of refinement and

empowerment that serves as a model. The narrative is not simply about museums and traveling on already established white circuits, or presenting a modified Oriental captivity narrative. It is about complex transformations out of “timeless” Africa and into western modernity and transgressing established color lines in order to challenge Reconstruction-era politics in the United States.

In many ways, Said uses a form of opacity that enables him to develop a strategy of accommodation and adaption that challenges dominant western modes of thinking and categorization. A critical aspect of this opacity is the way Said presents himself as a “polyglot” with access to various discourses: “pure English can hardly be expected from one who has to choose his words and phrases from a mass of Kanouri, (my vernacular), Mandra, Arabic, Turkish, Russian, German, Italian and French, and all of them encumbered with the provincialisms necessarily” (vii). Because of his travels as a slave and servant, Said no longer possesses a fixed linguistic site from which to territorialize. He constructs a sense of social power not rooted in the institutions of the American south, but in the transnational pathways outside the nation. This act of agency enables him to construct a more refined social persona than his fellow blacks and place himself into a position of coexisting contradictions that, to paraphrase Homi Bhabha, challenge the very logic of selfhood.⁴⁶

It is important to state that Said does not write a modified Oriental captivity tale, or an American style slave narrative, but chooses to write a travel narrative. His stance as a privileged outsider destabilizes normative positions that blacks achieved and marks a breach of international borders that threatens the dominion of southern territorialization.

⁴⁶ Homi Bhabha writes that postcolonial, or migrant writers “are positioned in a range of contradictory positions that co-exist” (5) that challenge the very logic of selfhood. Such subject positions ultimately “change the very terms of our recognition of the ‘person’” (5).

We are reminded that the nature of the transnational subject is to trespass, to mimic, and deploy strategies of opacity. In this manner, he configures the conventions of the travel narrative to appropriate the ontological stability that European gentility represents and then to disturb those conventions as he redeploys them to challenge the authoritative ideologies of western ideologies of oppression. His identity is porous, no longer a product of the land of Kanem-Bornu—rather, it is an unstable, fluid subject position that places him on shifting planes of national identities, where he disrupts subjectification and creates himself as a world subject. Consequently, the preface shows him entering western discourses on his own terms and manipulating the traditional power conditions between dominant/marginal subject positions as he presents himself as an intellectual activist.

Undoing Stereotypes: Intervening in Privileged Western Discourses

In the first section, Said constructs an ethnography of Kanem-Bornu and presents local customs, peoples, forms of government and religion. Images of an Edenic, pre-western utopia that westerners have defiled are not present here—a technique used by Equiano and Baquaqua under the influence of abolitionist discourses. Instead, Said depicts an alternative system of civilization governed by able rulers and heroes, with its own political and social traditions that date back thousands of years. Although the narrative suffers from the use of heroic idealism to depict key African leaders, this rhetoric also challenges African stereotypes and helps him make affinities to American ideals of freedom and self-determination. For that reason, Said uses revolutionary rhetoric when describing “King Mohammed El Amin Ben Mohammed El Kanemy, the Washington of Bornou” (10). Instead of myths and Edenic origins, Said seems interested

in constructing a native voice that challenges the historical legitimacy of imperialistic discourse, and paints a picture of his people willing to adopt American principles of freedom—but mainly on their own terms.

Said uses the travel narrative as a way to uncover “symptoms” of larger African displacements and claims that the main problem for African self-determinacy is the history of outside interference. According to Deleuze, symptoms pertain to the forces of “life gushing forth or draining away” (143). Said intervenes in the symptom production and rearranges its order from a distinctively African perspective. A centerpiece of his symptomology is that African suffering occurs because of the western epistemic violence of representation and stereotyping. One target of his work is Heinrich Barth, who was a researcher of Central and West Africa who transcribed African oral histories. He maintained a close relationship with El-Kanemy of Bornu and other rulers of the region and gained an understanding of this region that previous explorers and researcher did not reach. Eventually, he published *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa* (1858). Another target alluded to in the text, although not directly mentioned, is John Lloyd Stephens’s *Incidents of Travel in Egypt, Arabia Petraea, and the Holy Land* (1837). Although both Barth and Stephens are concerned about historical accuracy, elements of the “Hamitic Hypothesis” underpin their projects. According to Pekka Masonen, the Hamitic Hypothesis argued that “the seeds of civilization had been planted by representatives of the more advanced white civilizations from the Mediterranean and the Middle East, and cultural progression was developed by the fair-skinned ‘Hamitic’ peoples” (435).

In this regard, Said attempts to claim a “black” ontology for major African civilizations. William Wells Brown and David Dorr made their own contributions when they intervened within the field of Egyptology to challenge western theories of Semitic origins of African civilizations. Said chooses a different battleground, the Empire of Kanem-Bornu, to challenge western Hamitic theories. He claims that “Africa has been, through prejudice and ignorance, so sadly misrepresented, that anything like intelligence, industry, etc., is believed not to exist among its natives” (14). Said refutes the position that westerners should be sympathetic to the Muslim Fulanis—a stance held by noted ethnologists of African Muslim identity, William Hodgson Brown and Theodore Dwight, Jr. Taking a page from John Lloyd Stephens, who had his own problems with the Muslim takeover of Egypt, Said documents the “desolation and ruin” caused by Islamic incursions, both Arab and Fulani (15). He goes on to claim that the Islamic fighters who entered the region were a recently territorialized nomadic force that undermined the accomplishment of already established states. Said argues:

That previous to the introduction of Islamism in Soudan arts and sciences had reached a respectable attitude, is attested by the ruins of several towns in Bornou, Mariadi, Nouffi and other countries. The ruins of Gambarou, the Bisnia of geographers, covers an immense area, the walls of which were built of burnt clay, extensive palaces, gardens, and other works of art flourished. (14-15)

The most egregious symptom of African degeneracy is something that literally attacks the body: slavery. Frequent wars between Kanem-Bornu and the Fulanis and the history of trans-African slavery have scarred the region. Africans enslaving each other

and waging senseless religious wars only makes the problem worse. Said considers these incursions as symptoms of some type of extreme mental illness and irrationality:

Anything like enterprise was rendered impossible, fanaticism and bigotry overruled everything, and the Mohammed proselytes at once arrayed themselves against every non-follower of the Prophet as his implacable enemies. Crusade after crusade was made against the pagan tribes, who, if they had the misfortune to fall into the hands of the Moslems, were either massacred or reduced into slavery. Cities after cities were razed to the ground. (15)

The Fulanis are not the only cause of suffering in Africa. He also accuses his own kingdom of waging imperialistic wars of aggression against fetish Africans. In the following section, Said frames the trauma of slavery in terms of embodiment and disease. Specifically, Said establishes a phallogentric justification (circumcision) used by Shegu Omar:

A few months before my capture, Kouka was thrown into a great excitement. Warlike preparations were being made, and on inquiry, it was found that our King was going to make war on the King of Mandra, who, it is said, had insulted him.

In less time than a fortnight, the army was in motion. But, on reaching the Mandra territory, its King came out and apologized, and peace was at once restored. But Shagou Omar, instead of returning to Bornou, invaded Mouzgou, a country north of Mandra, and literally

carried its whole population to Bornou. The number of these unfortunates amounted to thirty five thousand souls, men, women and children.

Dysentery broke out among them, which carried off a large number. This inhuman act of Shagou Omar was without excuse, for the Mouzgous were peaceable people. The sole pretext was, that the Mouzgous were uncircumcised kaffirs, (infidels), and it was acting in accordance with the precepts of the Koran to convert them to Islamism, or, in the event of their failing so to do, to reduce them into slavery. (32-33)

One-third into the narrative, Said provides a compelling eyewitness account of the virulent nature of the Tuaregs that penetrate borders and cause disruption.⁴⁷ At age fourteen, Said entered the local madrasa to learn to read and write; however, Tuareg raiders interrupt his studies in the woods outside Lary: “The warnings of my mother recurred to me and in very bitterness of spirit, I wished the whole horrid circumstance a dream. But, alas! it was too sternly real! I was in the hands of the dreaded, the cruel Kindills, a slave, and I could not form the slightest idea what was going to become of me” (41). What makes this moment effective is that Said deploys elements of sentimentality to bring the emotional impact of this symptom to the reading public and to highlight the sense of separation and fracture through the presentation of his own body. Generally, westerners like Mungo Park and René Caillié depicted Tuaregs as cruel pirates of the desert that snatch innocent victims and sell them into slavery. Said provides his

⁴⁷ According to Robert O. Collins, the major West African Empires “had to cope with the perennial and piratical razzias, raids by the Tuareg of the Sahara from the beginning of the trans-Saharan trade to the present day” (Africa: A Short History 63). The Tuaregs used these raids to supplement their local nomadic economy and provide the Ottoman Empire with black slaves. Erdhem explains that “kidnapping was practiced on more or less regular basis, mostly regardless of the government’s attitude by the peoples of certain frontier regions which bordered slave-recruitment areas” (45).

own criticism of the Tuaregs when he describes them in terms of a drug-induced spatio-temporal disorientation. Not only does Said describe horror, but also reinforces empathy through his suffering by presenting terms like “hashish-eating” and “drunkards” to demonstrate this point. Note that this language of emotion also conveys the sense of religious disjuncture that affects Africa and how the nominally Muslim Tuaregs do not respect religious affiliation: “the religion of the Kindills, like that of most nations in this section of Africa, is Mohammedan. But that does not prevent them from preying upon their brethren” (43).

Apart from a few narratives presented in Philip Curtin’s *Africa Revisited*, depictions of the sub-Saharan slave trade from a black perspective are relatively rare. Most accounts come from European explorers, Arab ethnographers and Christian missionaries of varying reliability and objectivity. Because of this textual scarcity, Said’s contribution is particularly important in helping researchers understand this historical phenomenon. Amazingly, from the written evidence that he provides, we can draw a rough correlation between his account and testimonials written about the transatlantic slave trade—complete with depictions of cruelty, reductions of blacks into animal states, the effects of psychological trauma and even the ramifications of a failed slave uprising. Timothy Marr writes that “the forced migration of African slaves through the Sahara and across the Red Sea into Islamic lands has been estimated to be larger in number and as grueling in duration as those forced to undergo the ‘Middle Passage’ to the Americas . . .” (159).

Descriptions of pain and suffering drive much of the narrative to the oasis of Katchna, which is modern day Katsina in Hausaland, northern Nigeria. The oasis is a

contact zone where slavers reconfigure and reorder enslaved Africans. In some ways, we can read this oasis as a type of Foucaultian clinic where from all points of the fractured African continent, slavers combine and commodify bodies into a singularity: the slave caravan. If this is accurate, then it is appropriate that Said is bought by Abd-El-Kader, a “half Arab and half African,”⁴⁸ a figure who stands between two worlds of domination, who collected “about twenty slaves of both sexes, from Haoussa, Fellatah, and Timbouctou.” He is the doctor who nurses slaves to health to traverse the desert. His mode of medicine, however, is a reflection of the severity of the slave system. For instance, he beats Said into health: “during which time he beat me very often, because I was becoming emaciated with grief and pining for my home. He used to try to make me eat more, evidently fearing I would die and he would thereby lose his money” (45).

In a scene that easily could have been inspired by the depictions of death in the desert by John Lloyd Stephen’s *Incidents*, Said makes the dead bodies in the desert a centerpiece of his rhetorical strategy. In the following passage, he presents the corpses that he witnesses on the Blima Route:

After leaving this oasis, we found ourselves in the midst of the great Sahara. This ocean of scorching sand has been so often described by more graphic writers than myself, that I will not attempt to paint it in words. Indeed, a perfect picture in words, or on canvass, is impossible. Sahara must be seen and felt to be realized. All along our route we found great numbers of carcasses, human carcasses, completely dried up by the

⁴⁸ El-Kader buys Said for the price of “a burnoose, (a kind of cloak,) and an old rusty blunderbuss, both of which might be bought for about the value of ten dollars in United States coin.” Said claims that this “was a good price, as full grown males were usually sold to traders for about three dollars, and young women for about a dollar more” (45).

scorching rays of the ever unclouded sun. The heat is so great that flesh becomes as dry as bone, before it can be dissolved. Here are found no hyenas, no vultures to prey upon the dead, and the traders never bury any one who falls in the desert. The bodies lie until inhumed by the parching sand storms, or until pulverized. It is said that the traders leave these dead bodies exposed to frighten their caravans of slaves into faster walking.

(51-52)

Although Said grounds himself in already established tropes, he pushes the images further to give us the opportunity to recognize the way an oppressive “bio-power” reinforces regimes of authority. The body is appropriated in death to mark the singular pathway toward north Fezzan, a molar line of constrained intensities that territorializes the slave space. This construction of power reminds us that the state or slaver controls the potential agency of the self to seek alternative pathways through the appropriation of the body for continued work. Each rotting body conveys its own signs that mark the political and social landscape and consequently reflects the ability of the slavemaster to control movement and space. So there is striated space to negotiate for the slave and often he or she will succumb to the authoritative discourse of that space.

The question arises: how does Said resist these codes and articulate his own agency? Judging from the vast body of slave narratives throughout the centuries, there is often one central moment when the slave displaces the authority of the master class—Douglass striking his master, Equiano desiring to talk to the text, Jacobs having an affair with a white man to thwart the unwanted advances from her master. Said finds his opportunity when he enters the region of Fezzan and reveals to El-Kader that he is the

son of Barca Gana, a revelation that leads to a transformation of status from a slave without the chance of redemption into a hostage held for ransom. The story of transformation is not complete without one major detail that Said offers: “I was . . . unwilling to recross the inhospitable Sahara, but begged him to sell me to the Turks, who I had heard, were very good masters” (55). This act of manipulation into better quarters is an impressive modification of the Franklinian model of self-agency and self-determination. He chooses not to endure a reverse trek through the desert to explore potential adventure in North Africa.

Said adopts the cultural capital of the region—an ability to maneuver that foregrounds his later trajectories in Istanbul and Europe. His sale to Abdy-Aga, a Turkish captain at the local garrison, results in an advancement of social position and status. He enters a world of privilege, and accesses various sites of power and wealth: “My master visited the Pacha’s residence every day, and generally carried me with him. He dined at Court, and when I was with him, which was almost always, I dined there too; and fared sumptuously on mutton, cous cous, etc. . . .” (56). This section reflects the sense of “extremes” that a slave in the Islamic world experiences. Bernard Lewis claims that “it would seem that while slaves often suffered appalling privations from the moment of their capture until their arrival at their final destination, once they were placed with a family they were reasonably well treated and accepted in some degree as members of the household” (13-14). This rhetorical strategy helps us to understand a system of slavery that is different from its American counterpart. More crucially, Said shifts rhetorical and genre conventions and enters different modes of expression by the middle of the narrative where he problematizes western assumptions of the inherent savagery of Turkish culture.

Tripoli: Intervention, Destabilization and Displacement

In discussing “the Orient,” Said presents himself as a learned traveler who has used his journeys as an avenue of self-construction and opportunity. He adopts a western narrative persona who uses many traditional tropes of the genre—critiquing basic backwardness, the element of decay, and the concept of the illusion; however, he does not endorse western intervention in the region as found in other travel narratives of the period or choose to romanticize the region by reproducing traditional exotic myths. Instead, there is a sense of reserve and trepidation about this type of imperial discourse and he attempts to write a more objective assessment of the region through his own perspective. A key trope throughout the section is the presentation of the Orient as more a concept of the imagination than an empirical reality ready for American mastery and control. At one point in the narrative, Said cites a line from Scottish poet Thomas Campbell: “Tis distance lends enchantment to the view” (63). It is obvious to Said that the notion of the “fantasy,” both benevolent and malevolent, has determined western discourses on the region and attempts to develop a type of narrative persona who can penetrate the historical misrepresentation of the region.

Said encounters what many travelers document in their writings, a deflating sense of reality that clashes with the tales of wonder that frequently framed Oriental discourses. On his journey from Fezzan to Tripoli to visit his new master, Hadji Daoud, who is Abdy-Aga’s father, Said discovers firsthand the role that the imagination plays in constructing the “Orient:” “our imagination all aglow with the description of wonderful Tripoli, its castles and cannon and ships, related to us by a Mandra freedman, named Ali, who had joined our party at Sookna” (63). This second-hand story is told to children who

construct imaginary worlds. Nonetheless, the outcome is very familiar to readers of Oriental travel narratives. Upon reaching Tripoli, Said notes a sense of disappointment: “the great castle, the mosques, the ships in the harbor, and, above all, the apparently boundless sea, stretching away to the sparkling water-line to the northward, were novel sights to us Soudanians, but nothing to compare with the description given of them by our Mandra friend, Ali” (63). As he comes upon a decayed infrastructure of earlier civilizations, he makes the reader draw indirect allusions not to the viability of potential American intervention to raise these cities, but to the wasted ancient cities of West Africa. The notion of resurrection and reclamation are not a fundamental part of his project. Much as the ruins of Gambarou present a somber image of waste, the city of Tripoli occupies a similar rhetorical purpose, with its “great number of narrow, dirty lanes, flanked by generally mean houses, thrown together without regard to order, and, owing to the absence of front windows, more resembling dead walls than dwellings” (64).

Nevertheless, within this decayed framework, Said writes about peoples who simply do not appear with any consistency in western accounts and in the process presents a benevolent and often sophisticated image of the Turks. To support his observations, Said claims that if given the choice, he would return to this part of the world—considering that he had written the account while living in the United States, the following is an interesting admission:

Hadji Daoud treated me with extreme kindness, and, in this connection, I feel constrained to say, that of all the nationalities of people I have seen in my life, I like the Turks the best. They have the name, abroad, of being

extremely fierce and cruel, but the contrary is true. They are generally kind-hearted, generous and hospitable; and even their soldiers, who in battle are renowned for their courage and reckless daring, are ordinarily the mildest and most pleasant-mannered of men. The chief desire of my life, next to a visit to my home, is the desire I entertain of living among the Osmanlis again. (68)

The socio-political connotations for a republic just emerging from a devastating Civil War are profound here. Remember that this type of criticism against the intolerant atmosphere in the United States was a popular feature of black travel writers, who often noted different racial experiences for blacks throughout the world. For instance, Frederick Douglass found travel in Europe a liberating experience and claimed that, when contrasting American and British perceptions of blackness: “Instead of a democratic government, I am under a monarchical government . . . I breathe, and lo! the chattel becomes a man!” (49). Overall, Said finds alternative locations of tolerance and masculinity for blacks inside the Orient—a region that whites usually depicted as a bastion of cruelty, lasciviousness, and despotism.

In *Race and Slavery in the Middle East*, Bernard Lewis confirms that Muslims generally did not view blacks through the spectrum of some preconceived biological determinism. The idea that blackness could be equated with slavery simply did not exist at the initial stages of Islam’s formation: “The Qur’an expresses no racist or color prejudice” (Lewis 21). Although Arabs started to develop involved ethnological treatises that argued for some type of African inferiority, they never adopted any systematic scientific expression of black inhumanity as in the west. As shown in Said’s narrative, we

can read fundamental differences between Turkish and American societies by examining the treatment of black soldiers at the local garrison. According to Said, the Turks did not practice a race-based system of inferiority: “there seems to have been no prejudice among the Turks on account of complexion, their only prejudice being of a religious character” (69).

Furthermore, in a stinging indictment of the plantation system in United States, Said argues that manumission among the Turks occurs suddenly and often without warning. Lewis affirms this contention and shows that slavery produced unexpected types of mobility, especially compared to American slavery.⁴⁹ It is important to note that this type of discourse and rhetoric was common in white travel narratives as well. In commenting on the horrors of the sub-Saharan slave trade, Stephens notes many differences from its American counterpart. He writes that:

In the East slavery exists now precisely as it did in the days of the patriarchs. The slave is received into the family of a Turk in a relation more confidential and respectable than that of an ordinary domestic; and, when liberated, which very often happens, stand upon the same footing with a free man. The curse does not rest upon him forever; he may sit at

⁴⁹ Since slavery in the Islamic regions had a tendency of being a temporary condition, where occasionally slaves negotiated their freedom or earned manumission for exceptional work, there were not communities of slaves tied down to the land like those in the west. In fact, generational slavery, where children were born into slavery did not occur frequently except for lower class domestic servants and the *devçirme*. Typically, male slaves were castrated and turned into eunuchs or into soldiers; some slaves managed to gain manumission through military service—in other words, rising through the ranks; domestic servant slaves tended to produce “generational” slavery—however, as Lewis writes, “there were not many such descendants—casual mating was not permitted and marriages was not encouraged” (10); and then there was stark reality that many slaves, especially those who came from remote places and lacked immunity, died from epidemics. For a more detailed examination of slavery in the Islamic world, please read Lewis, Chapter 1.

the same board, dip his hand in the same dish, and, if there are no other impediments, may marry master's daughter. (*Incidents* 63)

Said's appropriation of this type of discourse carries additional weight simply because of his position as a black man and critic of black oppression in the American south. In this case, slavery in the Near East must be seen in terms of mutability, where subjects transfer across boundaries of enslavement and freedom quite often. This system of slavery leaves a population constantly moving and entering new social spaces, suggesting a racially permeable world without obstruction and fixed categorizations of identity that suppress and limit specific groups. To support his point, Said describes discovering former friends from Bondu imprisoned in the Tripoli slave market and explains that the Pascha of Tripoli arranged to ransom them "having learned that they were from the best families in Bornou, purchased the whole lot and held them for ransom" (73). The Bornu slaves gain their freedom and quite quickly enter the general population as guests of the Pascha with complete privileges until their return to Bornu could be arranged.

The presentation of life in the Near East turns away from western stereotypes with an examination of the nature of religious differences in Tripoli. In a unique moment of the genre, Said presents Christians and Muslims as equal partners in hatred and misunderstanding: "the Christians considered treated them as infidels, and they, in turn, looked upon the Christians, from a religious view, as no better than dogs (*gior*), and here the matter ended by mutual consent" (70). Since he does not paint a flattering portrait of any major religious group, we can read the narrative challenging the teleological foundations of Christian rhetoric presented in most travel narratives and slave narratives.

This attitude is apparent when he criticizes western intervention in the region during the Barbary Wars. In *Islam and Arabs in Early American Thought*, Faud Sha'ban writes: “[the Barbary War] had a great influence on America’s earliest images of Muslims and influenced its attitude towards them. This political and strategic involvement provided the first real person-to-person contact Americans had with representatives of Islam” (Sha’ban 65). Sha’ban explains that many Americans saw war with the North African states as a part of a providential plan toward gradual expansion into the region. Schueller takes Sha’ban’s claims and posits her own interpretation of the Barbary War by arguing that the war provided one of the “articulations of early imperial nationhood.”

Although strained religious relations between Christians and Muslims were normal in Tripoli, the lingering aftermath of the Barbary Wars, especially the action of the “Christian navies,” could still be felt. Said mentions that “The Mohammedans had not forgotten the bombardment their city received from some Christian men-of-war, years before, on account of the mistreatment of some Christians; and, in consequence, were wisely circumspect in their conduct towards them” (71). Perhaps the text is prophetic in anticipating the later work of criticism that would explain American involvement in the Middle East during the late twentieth century. Nevertheless, Said scripts himself into a unique social position—critic, dissenter, and observer—who does not subscribe to America’s imperialistic plans and ultimately declares his desires “to see fair play in these matters” (71).

Mecca/Smyrna/Istanbul

An important aspect of his stay in the Orient is the way he chooses to recount his travels there as he enters types of cosmopolitan routes that transform into transnational routes of opportunity and self-invention. In this regard, the narrative claims the travel narrative from westerners and reconfigures the way Europeans adopted the name “traveler.” In many ways, Said follows the ordered worlds of his master, being shaped by the obstacles he confronts. At one point, Said depicts the travels of his master on the *hajj*, which presents a type of rational agency that not only establishes that Muslims sought to account for their own travel, but also challenges the monopoly that westerners had in writing about the routes and pathways in the Orient (Khair 72). Susan O’Brien reminds us that the *hajj* and pilgrimage routes to Mecca and Medina have “provided conduits for religious, economic, and intellectual exchange” between various sections of West Africa and “the Muslim Arab worlds of North Africa and the Middle East” (11). These routes present a rhizomatic network that connects Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Nations and peoples are not considered in terms of hermetically sealed ontologies. Instead, he documents the flow and ebb of pilgrims in a way that opens to westerners, to borrow a quote from Khair, “the large areas of blindness in the hegemonic perception of human mobility.” Said provides many descriptions of Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula through the perspective of a participant-observer who collects the voices of the pilgrims—mostly his master’s and those travelers they encounter along the way. In particular, Said makes ethnological notes about the cultural and social achievements of the region, particularly focusing on Daoud’s exploits within a cosmopolitan setting. These scenes often depict the privileged circuits and watering holes that upper class Muslims inhabited.

Interestingly, Mecca reveals the limitations of his social position. First, establishing that the narrative makes a valuable contribution toward our study of the 19th century Hajj is important and provides us one of the earliest African American perspectives. As Paul Lund explains:

Between 1503 and 1931, for example, some 25 Westerners visited Mecca and returned to write about it. They included a Renaissance tourist, an English prisoner of war, a Spanish spy, an Italian deserter, a Swiss scholar, the incomparable Sir Richard Burton, translator of the *Arabian Nights*, and an Austrian Jew who, after his conversion to Islam, became Pakistan's Minister Plenipotentiary to the United Nations.

Said provides exact ethnological details of the Kaaba, the surrounding city and the supposed healing powers of the *Zem Zem* waters. There are accounts of the dedication of pilgrims, the economic activities of the region, and commentaries on the state of the local government run by the Sherrifs, "or direct descendants of Mohammed," who "now control this whole section of the country." The main difference from Richard Burton's influential account is that Said cannot enter the Kaaba: "being a slave . . . I was debarred the felicity of salting the petrified angel [Kabba] [sic]" (96).⁵⁰ A main pillar of Islam is that all Muslims must perform the Hajj at least once in his or her life. Exceptions only occur concerning certain types of slaves because their dedication toward Islam cannot be determined. While Said does not enter the exclusive interior of the Kaaba, the narrative transgresses on some marginal territory as Said gives voice to the slaves of the Orient and ends up revealing much about the limitations imposed upon them. Despite receiving kind

⁵⁰ Burton entered the Kaaba dressed as an Afghan holy man.

treatment from his master and achieving a significant measure of success within the household, the reality of being prevented from performing one of the most basic rites within Islam is stark reminder of his status within the society.

The return from the Hajj to a burned down Turkish sector is another reminder of his position in North African society as he must change masters again and resume travel over more transnational circuits. Daoud sends Said into the care of Hussein, an agent who worked at Smyrna's slave market. The sea trip to the slave markets is interesting because Said chooses to critique the squalid state of various North African ports and does not offer any personal commentary about own suffering. In many ways, there are echoes of the "silent" Middle Passage that typically appeared in African Muslim slave narratives. Said modifies this tradition by maintaining a genteel voice that reinforces the sense that he is committed to presenting an objective assessment of his travel than documenting his deprivation and travails. Only when Said reaches the slave market does he mention that he suffered from hunger for "three three weeks... for Hussein would only furnish me with one meal a day" (112). Nonetheless, even with such disclosures, Said maintains the general tenor of the travel narrative and uses such episodes only to highlight his ability to adapt to circumstances and to overcome obstructions in a way that leads to new modes of opportunity and adventure. Such a moment occurs when Fuad Pacha buys Said to serve as both a "tchiboudji" and pipe cleaner and personal valet in Istanbul—stationed primarily at the Imperial Palace. In an important scene stressing the interconnection between mobility, transformation and social advancement, Faud washes and dresses him

in a “brand new and glittering costume.”⁵¹ With this change of costume, and transformation into a prestigious ornament, Said enters a cosmopolitan center unrivalled in the west at that point and encounters a new power regime where he develops new modes of analysis and evaluation.

A sense of exterior and interior affects the construction of identity and difference. He notes that Istanbul is “divided into quarters, in distinct ones of which, different classes or religious castes of people, exclusively, reside and transact their business” (119). From the interior, the palace marks the authoritative lines of order—it provides a fixed concept of power and control. Outside the palace, the exterior, a flurry of life revolves around this center. Deleuze and Guattari remind us that “the State itself has always been in a relation with an outside and is inconceivable independent of that relationship. The law of the State is not the law of All or Nothing (State societies or counter-State societies) but that of interior and exterior. The State is sovereignty. But sovereignty only reigns over what it is capable of internalizing, of appropriating locally” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 360). Because of his position, Said belongs to this interior world dominated by a phallogentric economy. Interestingly, he adopts a discourse that mimics the ruling class when he sees himself belonging to the elites who have separated from the rest of the population—in sense, belonging to a powerful substratum of the population grants him access to a world that other slaves, chroniclers of the Orient, and travelers could not reach. Specifically, Said claims that his position as a pipe-cleaner for Fuad Pacha gave “excellent opportunities of seeing and learning many things in regard to the Turkish etiquette and mode of living in the highest circles” (121).

⁵¹ Although not mentioned in any great lengths in the narrative, his master was the influential foreign minister of the Ottoman government who would play an important role in the Crimean War and eventually become Grand Vizier.

Unfortunately, the chapter about Istanbul is very short and fragmentary in nature, with its various descriptions about various aspects about the city's culture, local attractions and presentations of Ottoman poverty that dulls the luster of the mythical Orient. Interestingly, Said manages to make some brief comments about the types of access he gains to the palace, specifically to some historically closed sections, like the Seraglio, and in these minor digressions in the narrative flow, we can determine some of his attitudes and opinions about oppression and tyranny. Note that there is a well-established tradition of western writing depicting and critiquing the Seraglio, ranging from, just to mention a few, Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws*, Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette*, Peter Markoe's *The Algerine Spy in Pennsylvania*. In the narrative, the Seraglio does not serve as a focus of Oriental impenetrability, but as a symbol of access as Said befriends Kislal-Aga, the chief of the negro eunuchs, who was a native of Mandra and friend of Said's family. Through Kislal-Aga's influence, Said gains the opportunity to enter the palace: "on my becoming acquainted with him, he showed me many marks of kindness, and more than a dozen times introduced me into the Seraglio" (121). The fact that a black African managed to enter such a privileged space only strengthens the sense of authority that he attempts to maintain throughout the text and in the process. Despite a lack of poignant critiques directed at the Seraglio, there is a sense that Said is critical of the system of oppression that he encounters. Later in the text, he does note the abysmal treatment of women at the harem of his new owner, Reschid Pascha:

Reschid Pacha was very wealthy, and in consequence had a large number of wives and concubines, beautiful Circassian, Affgan and Persian girls,

for whom my heart has often bled and my blood boiled with anger when I saw them cuffed and beaten by the brutal eunuch's who were their custodians, and who enjoyed full authority to chastise any of them who gave the slightest offense. Although this same practice was common in my own country, I never could become reconciled to it; and to this day, though not more than in my youth, the sight of a man maltreating a woman always exasperates my feelings almost beyond control. (122-123)

We gain a sense of his developing voice and sense of social activism as he notes with disdain the treatment of women in both Bornu and the Orient. In this regard, western notions of gender rights enter his discourse, an act that suggests the hybridizing of various discourses in order to formulate a persona devoted toward challenging social injustice. While he does not offer any more comments about the subject, the brief excerpt shows a type of cultural appropriation that anticipates the more concerted interventions and disruptions of dominant Anglo-American discourses that later appear in the narrative.

The critique of oppression of women actually serves as an additional platform of self-reflexivity as he presents his own problems concerning the ramifications of his own slavery. In a section right before the description of the harem, Said describes his own displaced social position: "I began, this time to think that it was my fate to pass from hand to hand, with never a sure and definite resting place; and, more than once, have I turned my longing eyes to the southward, in the direction of beloved Kouka, and sighed for that rest which I could not find" (121-122). Whereas the women are subject to phallogocentric authority, and locked in a stationary apparatus, Said occupies an opposite

position that causes its own kind of suffering—the uncertainty of displacement and the fickle nature of his owners.

Nonetheless, a major difference for Said is that he can manipulate the phallogocentric system for his own benefit and gain a measure of outward mobility, in opposition to the bounded wives, concubines and slaves within the harem. For instance, Said writes that “Reschid Pacha like every Turkish master I had, treated me very kindly, giving me holidays, almost every day, from breakfast to noon, and furnishing me with small sums of money to spend in my own gratification” (122). Consequently, a milieu of action and rhythm frames the section as Said opens himself to flows and pulses of life within the cosmopolitan center of Istanbul. In some cases, we can draw affinities to Frederick Douglass in Baltimore and to his contact with ships and sailors. Said presents a similar scenario, but one presented on grander scale with the awesome spectacle of the Dardanelles offering a beacon of freedom: “[the Dardanelles] are constantly filled with ships of all nations, sailing into or out of the Black Sea” (114). In this case, despite the uncertainty of his ability to hold onto an owner, there is the sense of social uplift and mobility, whether voluntary or involuntary, that leads to better circumstances.

Reschid Pascha, Said’s new master, opens up a new transnational world of opportunity. It is worth considering briefly the importance of Said’s new master. Throughout the 1830s and 1840s, Reschid had been the Ottoman ambassador to Paris and London and was at that point the minister for foreign affairs. According to Caroline Finkel, Reschid had been considered Sultan Mahmud’s “most brilliant ambassador” (441).⁵² Between 1842 and 1858, Reschid developed a close relationship with English

⁵² It is worth noting that Reschid would eventually become the Grand Vizier for Sultan Abdulmecid I and become an architect for the Tanzimat social reforms.

ambassador Stratford Canning and other European figures: “Among the most intimate associates of my master were the French Ambassador M. De Montholon, the English Minister Lord Stratten de Ratcliffe, and the Envoy Extraordinary or Minister Plenipotentiary of Russia Prime Anatole Mentchikoff” (123). These relationships became so close that orthodox Sunnis would have seen them as heretical. In this regard, even Said presents his uneasiness: “Reschid Pacha, unlike most Moslems, associated intimately with the Christians, shook hands with them, ate, drank champagne and visited their theatres, and acted in such a way as to excite my fears that he was not truly Islam” (123).

During one of these meetings, Said’s life as a slave changes when the Russian envoy wishes to buy him. One major issue is that he cannot legally be sold to a Christian: “He offered a large price for me, but, under the then existing Turkish law, a Mohammed slave could not be sold out of the empire.” This particular rule was an important aspect of Ottoman slave practice and was meant to discourage *zemhis* (tax paying Christians and Jews who acknowledge the authority of the Sultan) from owning Muslim slaves. Symbolizing the secretive nature of these negotiations, this transfer requires a murky deal to be arranged, so Pacha handles the arrangement quietly: “so the matter was clandestinely compromised by the Pacha presenting me to the Prince” (124). Said unfortunately does not comment at length about the transfer or consider Reschid’s motivations. Nonetheless, this sale was the result of Said’s unintended social climbing in the Near East. He leaves Istanbul not as slave, but as someone entering a new epistemological terrain where he will experience new visions and conceptualizations of African identity and potential.

A Valet Crossing Europe

Moving across the Black Sea, Said explores the complicated construction of black identity within Czarist Russia, focusing on the travels of the black servant as part of the entourage. There is an already established tradition of blacks traveling to Russia. For instance, Nancy Prince wrote herself into the privileged title of “traveler” through a manipulation of gendered work. Said presents a more unorthodox tale because of the problems that his faith brings him in this land and his partial devotion to his new employer, which will delay his ascension to that privileged rank of a traveler for several years. Nonetheless, both writers share a similar sense of freedom in an empire that did not discriminate against blacks. The important research by Allison Blakely in *Russia and the Negro* (1986) establishes that blacks saw Russia as a place that “offered them a chance to gain a good and prosperous life that was singularly devoid of discrimination and humiliation because of their color” (Parry xii). Blacks of the nineteenth century, particularly those who had been slaves, saw Russia as a land of freedom and opportunity. For instance, there was a tradition starting with Peter the Great of employing black servants in the palaces, a practice that continued until the execution of Tsar Nicholas II in 1917. According to Blakely, “until the nineteenth century, these servants were normally acquired as slaves, principally by the way of Constantinople, Tripoli or Amsterdam” (15). Once in Russia, the slaves gained their freedom because the Czars frowned upon the notion of the African slave trade, and entered lifelong domestic service. Usually they entered Russian culture as equal participants, and the Russian population came to view these blacks as “rare and exotic, yet useful and ornamental” (Parry xii). In this capacity,

many black servants appeared in portraits with their employers, usually standing in the background.

An important question becomes: how does Said appropriate this new social reality? Because of his status and age, Said receives various boons and rewards. In one instance, he is finally given the education that Hadji Daoud and his other masters could not provide him: “Prince Peter [Prince Mentchikoff’s son] procured for me an instructor to teach me the Russian language” (128). While he finds the language difficult to master, he develops the skills to speak fluently. He reads Russian literature and claims the works by “Soumorokoff, Lomenosoff, Karamzin, and Pouchkin” (129). With the outbreak of the Crimean War, Said must leave Odessa and travel a long circuitous route to St. Petersburg. When he reaches St. Petersburg, Said is emancipated: “I . . . having never been ‘attached’ to Russian soil, I could not be a serf under the ‘free’ laws of that empire; and his excellency had notified me, on my arrival at the capital, that I was free, and at liberty to go whither-soever I chose” (134). However, this new life of freedom leads to problems when the prince leaves for battle and Said cannot acclimate himself to other members of the staff: “the treatment I received from the other servants became so intolerable that I was forced, much to my regret, to seek a situation elsewhere” (135).

Said manages to utilize the connections that he established with the Russian aristocracy and obtains a position with Prince Troubetzkoÿ in St Petersburg. He continues to gain access to exclusive regions of Russian power, including an impromptu encounter with the Czar, and seemingly becomes a privileged member of the prince’s staff. Nevertheless, as shown by his Turkish dress and Fez, Said continues to present himself as an outsider. Perhaps encouraged by his position as guardian of the Russian Orthodox

Church, the prince forces Said to join him at prayer, where he uses various types of manipulation to force him to convert. Eventually, Said chooses to “embrace the Greek faith, the State religion of Russia.” He leaves his “Mohammedan name of Mohammed Ali Ben Said” and adopts the “Christian name of Nicholas” (145). The prince presents Said with a “solid gold cross, and a chain of the same metal to suspend it around my neck by” (146). Said wears the cross “in the prevailing Russian fashion” and seemingly performs the normative practices of Russian culture. Nonetheless, we must view this conversion with extreme suspicion, as Said does not identify with aspects of Russian national identity. While traveling Europe with the prince, news reaches him of the fall of Sebastopol to the Allies and Said claims: “I could hardly repress my exultation, for my sympathies were with the Osmanlis” (161).

When it comes to social position, Said finds that Christianity does not provide the necessary opportunities to immerse him within Russian culture and join the staff of “domestics.” “[the Prince] had never allowed me to associate with the rest of his domestics.” Instead of assimilation, and repeating the stale marks of fixed identity, Said finds himself in a displaced zone in the palace—occupying a privileged status that disengages him from normative subject positions, considering himself “quite a superior being” (146). Later, while traveling in Europe, Said confronts his unusual status when he makes the mistake of consorting with lower class servants. He describes the incident:

Of all the people I have ever seen in my life, the English nobility are the highest livers, and the most fastidious in their surroundings. Indeed I disgraced myself at the country residence of Lady Waldegrave’s by associating with her footmen, and I was forced much to my regret to give

over my hitherto pleasant visits to her under household because, being a *valet de chambre*, and having degraded myself by mixing with my inferiors, I would have been compelled to remain with them in all future visits. (184-185)

While he considers himself a “domestic” in charge of taking care of the prince, and even occasionally babysits the prince’s niece, he must present himself as a servant of significant distinction. A ramification of entering this type of unstable terrain is that he must constantly negotiate the boundaries of his class.

Once in Western Europe, Said enters a privileged world inhabited by European travelers who journey from aristocratic home to the next because “it was unaristocratic to live at the hotels” (183).⁵³ European travelers usually were accompanied by servants, as James Clifford reminds us, “many of whom were people of color” (33). Blacks generally did not achieve the status of “travelers” because a nonwhite person “cannot figure as a heroic explorer, aesthetic interpreter, or scientific authority” (*Routes* 33). Servants have been traditionally excluded from the roles of travelers thanks to their race, class and dependent position upon the supposedly independent bourgeois or aristocratic traveler. Said’s narrative reminds us that servants managed their own forms of acculturation and manipulation in ways missing from standard travel narratives. For instance, David Dorr displays his own sense of cultural capital and manipulates what, according to Schueller, “the dominant culture had (even in the lower South in the 1850s) increasingly come to see as absolute oppositions: genteel and African-American, and more significantly,

⁵³ This presents a break from more established bourgeois forms of travel-writing that often center around the “hotel.” The hotel is often the setting for various travel encounters, something that Clifford writes, becomes “sites of intercultural knowledge.” Said, however, describes a much more exclusive regime of access. Arguing in another context, James Clifford claims that the concept of the “traveler” is complex.

educated and slave.” Said’s maneuver is more complex simply because of the various types of terrains that he covers. He becomes a student of European culture and history—learning several languages and visiting many museums and cultural artifacts in the cities to which he travels. Such access to European circuits is impressive for a former slave from Bornou. More significantly, he begins to be molded by western values and customs.

Interestingly, Said does not resign himself to living a life of travel and leisure and presents himself as a precocious spirit here wanting to understand the ways of freedom and liberty. When they travel to Rome, Said enters familiar territory documenting, like other travelers, the sorry state of the city. He describes the decay and squalor of the Roman jails, the prevalence of Roman thievery, and the corrupt nature of Roman government. He focuses his disdain on the policies of conservative Antonelli, who openly disdains all types of liberal reform: “he only wanted the old absolutism in which Rome became great and powerful, and he did not unite with it, the slightest hypocrisy of liberty, with which absolutistic statesmen are so fond of adorning themselves” (167). This type of criticism represents an awareness of the principle of liberty that he has come to understand through his travels. More importantly, there is a double articulation here: he not only enters traditional discourse about the corruption of the Roman government, and Italian society, but also directly criticizes American conservative attitudes toward race and reform during Reconstruction. He comes to understand the connection between education and liberty, which only masks his own attitudes toward the state of blacks in the American south: “misery and wretchedness have increased in the nation. Instead of public education, only public ignorance is fostered, and Rome has sunk most shamefully in the arts and sciences which, formerly invested it with a halo” (166-167).

Although Europe grants him privilege and freedoms that other blacks of the period did not have in the United States, four years of travel, which span 1855-1859, have left him with an ambivalent feeling about this type of nomadic lifestyle.⁵⁴ In one of the more important sections of the narrative, Said decides that he wants to return home to Africa and asks to leave the prince's service. Said explains that "When I communicated my wishes to the Prince he tried to ridicule me, stating that I was no longer an African but a citizen of Europe. He said I could not reconcile myself to the manners and customs of my countrymen" (185). Said confronts the same question that Equiano experienced nearly a century earlier about the ramifications of living in a type of transnational exile and must ask whether he truly had a home to return to. The prince, who evokes his paternal stance, makes Said a counteroffer: "I would stay with him twenty years he would give me a pension the rest of my days" (185). Although the offer entices Said, he chooses instead a path of self-sufficiency and independence: "All this, however, did not deter me from returning to Soudan" (186). While the Prince's words convey a reality about Said's identity—stating that he is a man of the world, a traveler who cannot possibly go back to his point of origin because returning to such points is impossible—Said also realizes the necessity of escaping the yoke and authority of a man for whom he would only be a servant. Quite simply, much like Frederick Douglass and William Wells Brown, to escape the patriarchy of the white male's authority, Said must create his own pathways and construct his own identity.

⁵⁴ It is worth noting that the *Autobiography* states that Said served with the Prince from 1855-1867. Compelling historical evidence by Austin shows that Said actually left the service in 1859 and then migrated to the United States. In 1861, Said joined the Union Army.

Enter the Caribbean: Reconnecting with African Identity

When Said moves away from the life of luxury and privilege, he enters a new world where he is defined as a black migrant subject. In a symbolic move, Said retires to a half-way house: “this kind and best of men left London for Geneva via Paris, and I removed quarters to the ‘Strangers’ Home, for Asiatics, Africans, and South Sea Islanders” (186). This type of transient home is at the opposite end of the luxurious homes that Said used to visit. The home is a chronotype of lower-class traveling cultures that had not been traditionally given name or consideration in the literature of the period. This is a place without the tradition of the hotel, where histories, travelers, and privilege reaffirm the customs of European culture. Instead, the transient home is a space that testifies to a lifestyle of displacement.⁵⁵ Said discovers that he enters a transient public space, a site of non-belonging that only encourages more forms of displacement and detachment.

Although he wants to return to Africa, he becomes acquainted with an American and his wife and agrees to travel to America as a servant: “my fondness for travel asserted its supremacy, I concluded to go with him . . .” (187). This represents yet another instance when Said chooses the liberating aspects of travel over the potential of securing himself a permanent home. They cross the Atlantic and reach New York sometime in 1860. The stopover in New York is not long, and they sail for Nassau in the West Indies, where Said deploys the sense of cultural capital that he accumulated throughout his travels and discovers an ambivalent African space that serves as a proxy home, yet troubles his spirit for reform and freedom.

⁵⁵ This halfway house and the “motel” in Clifford’s “Traveling Cultures” share much in common, although separated by at least a century.

The African community in Nassau is vibrant and a source of inspiration: “here I was perfectly beside myself with joy, on finding a great many liberated Africans, but all of them came from the coast of Guinea, Mandigoes, Nangoes, Kissi, Dahomey, Amatifous, and Kromantis” (189). However, transformations tend to remove people from source cultures and render communication difficult. He finds himself in a similar position that Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua had experienced when he “could not converse with them.” If we consider Glissant’s notion of opacity, then it is possible to imagine that elements of the African diaspora invented themselves in separate and fascinating ways. A moment or instant of separation leads to another configuration of identity and makes us recognize that all diasporas cannot communicate with each other clearly. Moreover, he is also reminded of the spatio-temporal sense of dislocation and loss associated with the diasporic lifestyle when he reaches the village of Adelaide. Historically, the village had been founded in 1830 to house retired British black sailors and train them to the “usages and modes of the civilized world.” It is a fitting symbol of a life of wandering and dislocation that Said discovers an African ghost town: “this place is now perfectly deserted, and nothing can be seen but the ruins of huts built in the African style” (190). Said views the village with a type of ambivalence as he considers the ramifications of a place once filled with diasporic figures with close ties to Africa, who managed to carve out a place in the New World, created a temporary identity, and then disappeared.

When Mr. and Mrs. Rochussen travel to Haiti, Said discovers a vital reconnection with black autonomy and the dignity of black struggle. He identifies with the spirit of the St. Domingo Revolution: “delighted at finding myself in the country where the heroes of the ‘Haytien Independence’ contended with the armies of Napoleon the Great” (191). In

particular, he assumes the sense of racial pride that echoes the male heroic rhetoric that he has continuously deployed: “I had always admired the exploits of Toussaint, L'Ouverture, Dessalines, Christophe, and other negro leaders, whose heroism and military talent are an honor to the African race” (191). Consequently, by admiring Haiti’s military struggle against the French, he makes a case that such a struggle was actually indicative of the greater potential of African peoples to assert their own place in the world.

This declaration of praise of Haitian history does not overshadow his critiques of the conditions of the country and its lackluster future potential. In *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, Sibylle Fischer claims that Haiti has been a source of “the unspeakable, as trauma, utopia, and elusive dream.” Apparently, Haiti was a historical warehouse of conflicting notions and idealistic images. Separating fact from fiction, as in the Orient, is a major project for Said. As he describes the Haitian situation, one cannot forget the way that William Wells Brown and other black leaders, frustrated by the lack of success in the United States in overturning slavery, saw Haiti as a possible site of relocation for African Americans. Considering Said’s earlier endorsement of Turkish culture, there are some intriguing juxtapositions here. Clearly, Said is not comfortable with the prospects for Haiti being a home for blacks as he negotiates the very haze that Fischer describes. Said wants to revise the way we understand how blacks entered modernity and points out that Haiti has been excluded and left to its own devices.

In this regard, he adopts a type of modified Pan-African discourse where he examines the question of black oneness, focusing on problems racism between blacks and

mulattos. He claims that “the government of Hayti . . . is most shamefully managed. It is a perfect image of anarchy; and goes to prove that the pure negro and the mulatto, who considers himself, (by virtue of his Caucasian half-bloodedness,) the superior of the former, and who always wants to rule him, cannot possibly live in harmony and prosperity” (193). According to Said, mulattos are agents of destabilization who are “unduly and arrogant[ly]” “presumptuous.” Said is keenly aware that revolutions tend to subvert themselves and in this particular case, considers the problems of Haiti’s own class system. He suggests that “the prejudice of color in the West Indies between the negro and the hybrid mulatto is much greater than exists in the United States” (194). There is a desire for reform here, but it is tempered by an underlying anger and frustration. In this regard, he considers Haiti’s problem as part of the similar symptomology that affects Africa: “no wonder the whites of different countries maintain that the negro is incapable of self-government. How is it possible for a community to be prosperous when its population entertain inveterate animosities among themselves?”(193-194). In a stark confession, he admits that “I would prefer that Hayti were one of the English or French colonies rather than in its present condition” (195). Ultimately, in this light, he sees Haiti as a Deleuzian black hole that undermines and obstructs the Africans’ ability to recreate him or herself.

Entering the American South: Educator, Lecturer, and Traveler

North America provides Said the opportunity to enter new professions and move into new social spaces. This point is amplified when the group heads to New York and Canada where Said encounters problems with his master’s racism and immoral behavior.

Much like Baquaqua, Said discovers that Canada does not represent the symbolic end of the journey to freedom or economic security. Instead, it just another temporary spot, something that Deleuze would consider in a different context as a coordinating conjuncture, that leads to another condition of movement. Said discovers that the gentleman and his wife have fled the country without paying the hotel bill—and without paying back the money that they had borrowed from him. Said explains that “His and my own things were seized, consequently, I lost all my clothing” (199). Much like the African slave who loses his identity as he crosses the Atlantic and reaches the United States, Said loses the clothing that represents various aspects of his previous identities: “four Turkish costumes, three full suits, of broadcloth, a dozen of linen and fine English flannel shirts, etc. etc., worth more than two hundred and fifty dollars” (199). Without the baggage of his past, Said is now stripped of his ontological origins and ornamental status. In some ways, we are reminded of the emotive conclusion of “Sunday Morning,” when Wallace Stevens writes of an “old dependency of day and night, / Or island solitude, unsponsored, free” (Stevens 56).

At this stage, Said resembles most the unfettered figure at the end of the poem, free to make his own choices and to choose his own paths. For instance, while in Aylmer, he becomes acquainted with Rev. D. T. Johnston, who “was a pastor of that parish.” Johnston loans him some money and recommends him to go to “Detroit, Michigan, or Buffalo, New York, where there were a great number of colored people” (200). This symbolic reconnection enables him to establish relations with the African community within a new locality. However, this is only temporary: “I left Aylmer for Prescott, where I crossed the St. Lawrence to Ogdensburg, New York, thence to Rome, Watertown,

Syracuse and Buffalo” (200). Once again, the sea plays a role in his relocation when he takes “passage on the Concord for Detroit, Michigan, as a deck hand” (200).

Subsequently, he secures himself a temporary position teaching black children French, an act of empowerment that marks an important transition where he can assume a supervisory role and employ the various tools that he learned through his travels.

The last section of the narrative depicts the fruition of his coming of age inside the United States where he creates a new persona that enables him to foster a sense of solidarity with African Americans and to transform from the wayward traveler/servant into an American intellectual activist. He outlines his trajectory in the following quote:

While in Sandusky City, I conceived the idea to go South, where I could be of great use to my benighted people in the capacity of a teacher. I selected Charleston, South Carolina as the basis of my operation. Accordingly I left Sandusky City for Cleveland, Ohio, thence to Buffalo, Rochester, Albany, Troy, Poughkeepsie and New York City, and embarked for the port of my destination. (202)

This section finds Said assuming a more public persona as he adopts the rhetoric of accommodation and dissent. In Charleston, Said takes up “quarters at Mrs. Cobb's boarding house in Calhoun Street” and becomes “acquainted with Wright, Langston, Randolph, Bozeman, Ransier, and a host of other less notable Northern colored men who came there for political purposes.” Said claims that the relationship does not yield much: “All the above named were very able men, but, with the exception of the last named, who was truly a very good and honest man, I have a very little opinion of their honesty” (202-203). Afterwards, he settles with southern whites: “I am proud to say that I have gained

the esteem of numerous white friends in Charleston, among which are Messrs. General Simmons, Kanapaux, Dr. Ogier, Sim, De Saussure, Chazal, Cohen, and a host of others who have shown me a great deal of favor” (203). He gains favor with a newspaper editor, who gives him writing supplies in order to transcribe his accounts for public lecture: “I proposed to give lectures on ‘Africa and its resources’” (204). In other words, he finds an ingenious way to establish and maintain transnational pathways between Africa and the United States and to appropriate new modes of expression. He reports that he made his “dèbut in Thomasville, then at Bainbridge Albany, Americus, Macon, Griffin, and Atlanta.” However, the business of public speaking about Africa proves to be unprofitable, and he heads to Forsyth in Monroe, where he takes up “a school sixteen miles from here in a village called Culloden.” As usual, this endeavor does not last long. He decides to become an editor: “after making arrangements as to the publication of my book, I started on a new plan, that of raising means by which to defray expenses of publication by voluntary subscriptions” (205). He manages to find potential subscribers for his endeavor; unfortunately, he does not discuss the project.

Throughout his American adventures, Said uses a rhetorical strategy of a cultured traveler who seeks recognition as a privileged outside observer. In the context of the apparatus of the post-slavery reconstruction south, this type of identity destabilizes normative positions that blacks achieved and marks a breach of international borders that threatens the dominion of southern territorialization. We are reminded that the nature of the nomad is to trespass and to transgress (Braidotti 36). Said heads to Alabama on the pretext that he could do some good for the blacks there who lived under fear of the Klu Klux Klan: “I was advised not to go to that State my life, they said, would be in great

danger. My own common sense dictated to me, of course, that it was not possible that such a state of affairs could exist in Alabama, besides that, there were good and bad in all countries.” What is fascinating is that blacks, themselves, seemed resigned to validate the boundaries of their oppression and capture. As Said writes:

I shall here say, however, that it was thought by the blacks and a good number of whites I traveled for the purpose of spying through the country. Blacks were sent at times to pick me, but I had nothing to tell them excepting that I traveled for my own amusement and gratification, at the same time, making a little something which I hoped would enable me to publish my *Adventures*. Some said I was harmless and quiet, and others that I was a Yankee emissary and a scoundrel. (206)

At stake here are the threats that Africans educated outside the United States pose to the establish orders of American racism. In this case, we can read elements of Ibrahima Abd ar-Rahman and Omar ibn Said slave narratives, figures who used their literacy to destabilize rigid southern orders by presenting untraditional depictions of African subjectivity rooted in the transnational boundaries that they crossed. Said manages his own form of agency by procuring letters of support from various white benefactors. In particular, Colonel Oates’ letter is very interesting: “The bearer, Nicholas Said, who is without a shadow of a doubt, a native African, and whose ostensible object in travelling through this country, is to obtain subscribers to his Autobiography, lectured here to-day” (207). This moment of authentication produces a type of mediated entrance into American modernity that enables Said to locate the spatial and political spaces that he chooses to travel across.

One important ramification of this border transgression is that Said deploys the cultural capital gained from his travels and chooses to open a school for the instruction of African American children. In this regard, much like other famous black educators like Lucy Craft Laney, and W.E. B DuBois, Said belongs to an important black political movement that sought to build schools and to promote racial equality through political empowerment. Said's story only modifies this tradition by relocating the educational traditions gained throughout the world within the politicized local space of the American south: "it is sadly true that my people here appreciate but slightly the benefits of education." Said declares that his "honest and ardent desire is to render myself useful to my race wherever it may be. I have no aspirations for fame, nor anything of the sort. But I shall always prefer at all times to find myself in the midst of the most ignorant of my race, and endeavor to teach the rising generation the advantages of education." Clearly, his rhetorical strategy enables him to enter complex types of public discourse where writing allows him to create name for himself: "Through his instrumentality, my name has become popular through Washington and Choctaw counties" (211).

The last section of the narrative fosters the privileged title of traveler that Said earns. Said explains that a condition that white benefactors impose upon him to publish his work is to describe several European health resorts. The section is significant because it affirms the power and privilege associated with the concept of the traveler in the post-bellum landscape. Said's decision to write a genteel travel narrative not only serves to mark a new expressive terrain of black identity, but also negotiates the complicated racial reality of the American south where he can publish his critiques of western imperialism and racism and mask it through the adoption of a familiar genre of writing. As a result,

the ending shows that Said posits a hybrid identity that can adopt the Anglo-American genteel tradition and yet maintain a black African identity very sympathetic to the plight of African Americans. In many ways, this identity, which is opaque and often resistant to easy classification, enables him to transgress borders, destabilize the expected roles of Africans by adopting the title of “traveler” and challenges the hierarchies of postbellum American society.

Ultimately, his life represents a model of cultural self-determination and recreation of the black self in three separate worlds. As a self-confessed man of the world who wishes to bring his experiences of travel to a community of sympathetic African Americans, Said shows that identities are not fixed along permanent lines and mobility offers the potential for self-creation and resistance. Clearly, there is a sense of power and liberation in the black diasporic consciousness, as well as tension between dispossession and belonging. It is a journey of shedding teleological baggage, developing the awareness of one’s potential to transform and create new possibilities that challenge white hegemony and imperialistic pursuit.

Conclusion: Summation of African Muslim Contributions

While the study of African Muslim slave narratives has been a highly specialized field, with a small core of devoted researchers reading and handling often obscure and according to Ronald Judy barely legible documents, it has not been growing sufficiently. For reasons outlined in various parts of this project, many researchers have not considered African Muslim contributions seriously enough. Unfortunately, those scholars who choose to write about these narratives tend to tread over familiar ground located in Austin's *Sourcebook*. In many regards, Ronald Judy was an important reminder that the field is not hermeneutically sealed and that a different range of questions about identity and representation needed to be asked. My dissertation recognizes that African Muslims during the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century transformed the landscape of national belonging, where verses of the Qur'an, the wayward trajectories of displaced Muslims and the shifting Arabic cartographies create a hybrid ethno-landscape of transnational becoming.

I establish that African Muslim narratives were a brief event in the development of black cultural identity in the United States. Although these Muslims did not propagate and establish roots in the conventional sense, their works managed to influence their environment and problematize conventional stories of the antebellum period. Typically, slave narratives have been read through the framework of how blacks obtained both "humanity" and freedom through literacy. Black literacy becomes tied to the tradition of American autobiographical writing that started with the Puritan tradition of writing to affirm a particular ontology and sense of mission (Baker 244). The narratives of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs map the historical contingencies of a complex

historiography of “being” and the unique self-reflexive properties of African American literary expression outside the bounds and tutelage of traditional American literary theory and pedagogy. With the more recent inclusion of Olaudah Equiano a type of triumvirate of texts has developed that establishes that blacks employed similar linguistic survival strategies, such as signification, intertextuality and doubleness in order to resist the dominant white structure. These endeavors would chart the path toward a modern black subjectivity that W.E.B DuBois would label as “double-consciousness” and establish a homogenous conceptualization of black identity struggle during the nineteenth century.

As this project showed, African Muslim slave narratives never fit into these traditional slave narrative methodologies. Instead, we can read alternative rhetorical strategies that navigate the tensions, contradictions, and reconfigurations of enslavement and displacement in the New World. As Andersen and Lee suggest, “displaced persons are not simply ‘objects’ but often conscious ‘subjects’ who take on active role in carving out their lives” (15). Their narratives are often complex and opaque statements that not only contribute to the Islamic expression in the Americas—in a sense, finding new ways to represent the Islamic community or *um ’ma*—but also manipulate traditional genres and constructs of African American identity, acts that for all practical purposes amount to breaks from “national” languages and western notions of space and time. African Muslim slave narratives enter the cracks or displaced zones spaces between oppositional binary structures like white and black within the state and challenge the oppressive framework of modernity as they work through questions of cultural identity. These narratives deploy a strategy of density that does not allow the western reader easily to subjectify an African identity into a fix concept of western thought. This opacity does not suggest that the

writers are attempting to evoke an intentional strategy. Instead, there are ongoing negotiations where they struggle to depict the complicated types of contact zones between West African Islam and the United States. In this regard, their works do not merely bear witness to the horrors of slavery, but become what Glissant considers “a *forceur de langage*” (someone who forces language into existence). Consequently, their works hybridize genres, languages, and identities in order to communicate a message of transformation and becoming and bridge basic problems of subjectification and language.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari claim that “contrary to a deeply rooted belief, the book is not an image of the world. It forms a rhizome with the world.” If this is accurate, African Muslim narratives are not isolated texts, but connect to important aspects of eighteenth and nineteenth century American life. This is important because Islamic contributions to the formation of American identities have been considered usually irrelevant. This project attempts to correct this impression and to locate these narratives as a fascinating and relevant aspect of American cultural history. In many ways, they attempt to develop a basic language of understanding between the “other” and the dominant. As a result, these narratives produce complex meanings, effects and realities that challenge conventional attitudes about Islamic identity in the United States and shock the conventional language of the slave narrative genre in order to address the complicated politics of identity and belonging.

Works Cited

- Adams, John Quincy. "The Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Vol VII." Ed. Charles Francis Adams. Philadelphia: J.P. Lippincott & Co, 1875.
- Alford, Terry. *Prince Among Slaves*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977.
- Alter, Stephen G. *Darwinism and the Linguistic Image: Language, Race and Natural Theology in the Nineteenth Century*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999.
- Andersen, Wann W. and Robert G. Lee. *Displacements and Diasporas: Asians in the Americas*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005.
- Andrews, William. *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865*. Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- Asad, Muhammad. *The Message of the Quran* (Online Edition). 18 Jan 2007.
<<http://www.geocities.com/masad02/>>
- Asad, Talal. "The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology." *Writing Culture*. Ed. James Clifford. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. 141-64.
- Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Austin, Allan. *African Muslims in Antebellum America: A Sourcebook*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1984.
- . *African Muslims in Antebellum America: Transatlantic Stories and Spiritual Struggles*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Baker, Jr., Houston A. "Autobiographical Acts and the Voice of the Southern Slave." *The Slave's Narrative*. Eds. Charles T. Davis & Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985. 242-261.
- Bakhtin, M.M.. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Texas: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- Bammer, Angelika, ed. *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.
- Baquaqua, Mahommah Gardo. *The Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua: His Passage from Slavery to Freedom in Africa and America*. Eds. Robin Law and Paul E. Lovejoy. Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2003.

- . "Letter 11. Mcgrawville." Personal Letter to George Whipple. 26 October 1853.
- Behn, Aphra. *Oroonoko*. Ed. Catherine Gallagher. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000.
- Benes, Tuska. "Comparative Linguistics as Ethnology: In Search of Indo-Germans in Central Asia, 1770-1830." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*. 24: 2 (2004): 117-132.
- Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Bland, Sterling Lecaster, Jr. *Voices of the Fugitives: Runaway Slave Stories and Their Fictions of Self Creation*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000.
- Blassingame, John. *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*. London: Oxford University Press, 1972.
- Bluett, Thomas. *Some Memoirs of the Life of Job, the son of Solomon, the High Priest of Boonda in Africa, Who was a Slave about two Years in Maryland, and afterwards being brought to England, was set free, and sent to his Native Land in the Year 1734*. London: Richard Ford, 1734.
<<http://docsouth.unc.edu/bluett/bluett.html>>.
- Bogue, Ronald. *Deleuze and Guattari*. New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Bosman, William. *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea Divided into the Gold, the Slave, and the Ivory Coasts*. 1704. London: Cass, 1967.
- Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Brantlinger, Patrick. "Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent." "Race," *Writing and Difference*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986. 185-222.
- Britton, Celia M. *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory: Strategies of Language and Resistance*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997.
- Brown, William Wells. *A Lecture Delivered before the Female Anto-Slavery Society of Salem, at Lyceum Hall, Nov. 14, 1847*. Boston, Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. 14 November 1847. Rpt in *The Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave Courier*. Ed. Larry Gara. Mineola: Dover Publications, 2003.

- Buchanan, Ian. "Deleuze and Pop Music." *Australian Humanities Review*. (August 1997): 24 pars. Retrieved August 9, 2008.
<<http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-August-1997/buchanan.html>.>
- Butterfield, Stephen. *Black Autobiography in America*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1974.
- Caruthers, William Alexander. *Kentuckian in New York*. 1834. Ridgewood: The Gregg Press, 1968.
- Casmier-Paz, Lynn A. "Slave Narratives and the Rhetoric of Author Portraiture." *New Literary History* 34:1 (Winter 2003): 91-116.
- Chaney, Michael A. "Picturing the Mother, Claiming Egypt: My Bondage and My Freedom as Auto(bio)ethnography." *African American Review*. 35: 3 (Autumn, 2001): 391-408.
- Clifford, James. Clifford, James. "Diasporas." *Cultural Anthropology* 9:3 (1994): 302-338.
- . *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art*. Cambridge: Harvard, 1988.
- . *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare and Other English Poets*. Ed. Thomas Ashe. London: George Bell and Sons, 1883.
- Conrad, Georgia Bryan. "Reminiscences of a Southern Woman." Rpt. in *African Muslims in Antebellum America: A Sourcebook*. Ed. Allan Austin. New York: Garland Publishing, 1984. 275.
- Cugoano, Quobna Ottobah. *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery and Other Writings*. Ed. Vincent Carretta. New York: Penguin, 1999.
- Curtin, Philip, ed. *Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade*. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1997.
- Davidson, Basil. *West Africa before the Colonial Era*. New York: Longman, 1998.
- Davis, Charles T., and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., eds. *The Slave's Narrative*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Davis, Curtis Carol. *Chronicler of the Cavaliers: A Life of the Virginia Novelist Dr. William A Caruthers*. Richmond: Dietz Press, 1953.

- Davis, David Brion. *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966.
- Degler, Carl N. *Neither Black Nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1971.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Essays Critical and Clinical*. Trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco. Minneapolis: U of Minneapolis P, 1997.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- . *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- . *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Trans. Dana Polan. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Claire Parnet. *Dialogues*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Speech and Phenomena: and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*. Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1979.
- . *Writing and Difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.
- Diedrich, Maria, Henry Louis Gates Jr., and Carl Pedersen, eds. *Introduction to Black Imagination and the Middle Passage*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. 5-20.
- Diouf, Sylviane A. *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas*. New York: New York University Press, 1998.
- Dorr, David. F. *A Colored Man Round the World*. Ed. Malini Johar Schueller. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999.
- Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. New York: Penguin Books, 1988.
- Dwight, Theodore, Jr. "Condition and Character of Negroes in Africa." *Methodist Quarterly Review* (Jan, 1864).
- . "On the Sereculeh Nation, in Nigritia: Remarks on the Sereculehs, an African Nation, Accompanied by a Vocabulary of Their Language." *American Annals of Education and Instruction*, V (1835).

- Eglash, Ron. *African Fractals: Modern Computing and Indigenous Design*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999.
- Ellis, Aimé. "Reading Black Literary Traditions." *Transforming Anthropology* 6:1&2 (1997): 10-21.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Charles Lam Markmann, trans. London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1952.
- Fischer, Sibylle. *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Gallaudet, Thomas. *A Statement with Regard to the Moorish Prince, Abduhl Rahhaman. New York, 1828*. Rpt. in *African Muslims in Antebellum America: A Sourcebook*. Ed. Allan Austin. New York: Garland Publishing, 1984.
- Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. *Figures in Black Words, Signs, and the "Racial" Self*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- . ed. *"Race," Writing and Difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.
- . *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- . *Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars*. London: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. and William L. Andrews, eds. *Pioneers of the Black Atlantic: Five Slave Narratives from the Enlightenment 1772-1815*. Washington D.C.: Civitas, 1998.
- Gerzina, Gretchen. "Mobility in Chains: Freedom of Movement in the Early Black Atlantic." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 100: 1 (Winter 2001): 41-59.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Glissant, Édouard. *Caribbean Discourse*. Trans. J. Michael Dash. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992.
- . *Poetics of Relation*. Trans. Betsy Wing. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997.
- Gomez, Michael. A. *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

- Goulding, B.L. "Affidavit of Captain Benjamin Lloyd Goulding as to Arabic Document." State of Tennessee, County of Hamilton, 1931.
- Grant, Douglas. *The Fortunate Slave: An Illustration of African Slavery in the Early Eighteenth Century*. London: Oxford University Press, 1968.
- Greenberg, Joseph H. "The Decipherment of the 'Ben-Ali Diary.'" *Journal of Negro History*. 25.3 (July 1940): 372-375.
- Grier, Matthew B. "Uncle Moreau." Fayetteville North Carolina Presbyterian. (23 July 1859). 480-483.
- Griffin, Cyrus. "Prince Abduhl Rahahman." Rpt. in *African Muslims in Antebellum America: A Sourcebook*. Ed. Allan Austin. New York: Garland Publishing, 1984. 137-144.
- . "The Unfortunate Moor." Rpt in *African Muslims in Antebellum America: A Sourcebook*. Ed. Allan Austin. New York: Garland Publishing, 1984. 134-136.
- Gurley, Ralph R. "Abduhl Rahahman, the Unfortunate Moorish Prince." Rpt. in *African Muslims in Antebellum America: A Sourcebook*. Ed. Allan Austin. New York: Garland Publishing, 1984. 144-148.
- Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck and John L. Esposito eds. *Muslims on the Americanization Path?* New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Padmini Mongia. London & New York: Arnold, 1996.
- . ed. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage in association with the Open University, 1997.
- Hallward, Peter. "Edouard Glissant between the Singular and the Specific." *The Yale Journal of Criticism*. 11.2 (1998): 441-464.
- Harris, Joel Chandler. *The Story of Aaron*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1896.
- Hasty, Christopher Francis. *Rhythm as Meter*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Henricks, Margo. "Surveying 'race' in Shakespeare." *Shakespeare and Race*. Eds. Catherine M.S. Alexander and Stanley Well. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press: 2000. 1-22.

- Hiatt, Alfred. "Blank Spaces on the Earth." *The Yale Journal of Criticism*. 5: 2 (2002): 223-250.
- Hodgson, William B. *Notes on Northern Africa, the Sahara, and Soudan*. New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1844.
- Hume, David. *The Philosophical Works of David Hume, Volume III*. Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996.
- Jordan, Winthrop. *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro 1550-1812*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968.
- Judy, Ronald A.T. *(Dis)Forming the American Canon: African-Arabic Slave Narratives and the Vernacular*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- Kaplan, Caren. *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996.
- Khair, Tabish. "The Politics of the Perception of Human Movement." *Migrant Cartographies: New Cultural and Literary Spaces in Post-Colonial Europe*. Eds. Sandra Ponzanesi and Daniela Merolla. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005. 67-78.
- Krupat, Arnold. *Ethnocriticism: Ethnography, History and Literature*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.
- Krupnik, Mark. *Displacement: Derrida and After*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983.
- Lavie, Smadar and Ted Swedenburg, eds. *Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographical Identities*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1996.
- Lears, T. J. Jackson. "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities." *American Historical Review*. 90: 3 (1985): 567-593.
- Lepore, Jill. *A is for American: Letters and Other Characters in the Newly United States*. New York: Knopf, 2002.
- Lewis, Bernard. *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: An Historical Enquiry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Marr, Timothy. *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Marschalk, Andrew. Letter. *Statesman and Gazette* 30 April 1828. Rpt. in *African Muslims in Antebellum America: A Sourcebook*. Ed. Allan Austin. New York: Garland Publishing, 1984. 151-154.

- Moore, Francis. *Travels into the Inland Parts of Africa*. Rpt. in *African Muslims in Antebellum America: A Sourcebook*. Ed. Allan Austin. New York: Garland Publishing, 1984. 93-100.
- Moore, Samuel, ed. *An Interesting Narrative. Biography of Mahommah G. Baquaqua, A Native of Zoogoo, in the Interior of Africa (A Convert to Christianity,) with a Description of That Part of the World; including the Manners and Customs of the Inhabitants*. Detroit: George Pomeroy and Company, 1854.
<<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/baquaqua/menu.html>>.
- Moore-Gilbert, Bart. *Postcolonial Theory - Contexts, Practices, Politics*. London: Verso, 1997.
- Mulvey, Christopher. *Transatlantic Manners: Social Patterns in Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Travel Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Olson, James Stuart. *The Peoples of Africa: An Ethnological Dictionary*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996.
- Osman, Ghada and Camille F. Forbes. "Representing the West in the Arabic Language: The Slave Narrative of Omar Ibn Said." *Journal of Islamic Studies* 15.3 (2004): 331-343.
- Parry, Albert. Introduction. *Russia and the Negro: Blacks in Russian History and Thought*. By Allison Blakey. Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1986.
- Pedersen, Carl. "Middle Passages: Representations of the Slave Trade in Caribbean and African-American Literature." *Massachusetts Review*. 34.2 (1993): 225-39.
- Pratt, Mary Louis. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Progler, Joseph. "Ben Ali and His Diary: Encountering an African Muslim in Antebellum America," *Journal of Arab and Muslim Perspectives*. 11 (2004): 19-60.
- Said, Nicholas. "A Native of Bornoo." *The Atlantic Monthly* 20:120 (October 1867): 485-495.
- . *The Autobiography of Nicholas Said, A Native of Bournou, Eastern Soudan, Central Africa*. Memphis: Shotwell & Co., Publishers, 1873.
<<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/said/menu.html>>

- . *The Autobiography of Nicholas Said, A Native of Bournou, Eastern Soudan, Central Africa*. Ed. Precious Rasheeda Muhammad. Cambridge: Journal of Islam in the America Press, 2000.
- Said, Omar Ibn. *The Life of Omar Ibn Said, Written by Himself*. Trans. Ala A. Alryyes. *The Multilingual Anthology of American Literature: A Reader of Original Texts with English Translations*. Eds. Marc Shell and Werner Sollors. New York: New York University Press, 2000. 95-145.
- Sanneh, Lamin. *The Jakhanke Muslim Clerics: A Religious and Historical Study of Islam in Senegambia*. Laham: University Press of America, 1989.
- Schueller, Malini Johar. *US Orientalism: Race, Nation and Gender in Literature 1790-1890*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998.
- . Introduction. *A Colored Man Round the World*. by David Dorr. 1858. Ann Harbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999.
- Sha'ban, Faud. *Islam and Arabs in Early American Thought: The Roots of Orientalism in America*. Durham: Acorn Press, 1991.
- Shah, Idries. *Learning How to Learn: Psychology and Spirituality in the Sufi Way*. New York: Arkana, 1996.
- Sheikh, M. Saeed. *Dictionary of Muslim Philosophy*. Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1970.
- Shell, Marc and Werner Sollors, eds. *The Multilingual Anthology of American Literature: A Reader of Original Texts with English Translations*. New York: New York University Press, 2000.
- Spillers, Hortense. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics* 17 (1987): 65-81.
- Starling, Marion. *The Slave Narrative: Its Place in American History*. 2nd ed. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1988.
- Stevens, Wallace. "Sunday Morning." *Wallace Stevens: Collected Poetry and Prose*. The New York: Library of America, 1997.
- Sundquist, Eric. *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Surin, Kenneth. "The Deleuzian Imagination of Geoliterature." *Deleuze and Literature*. Eds. Ian Buchanan and John Marks. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000. 167-193.

- Thomas, Helen. *Romanticism and Slave Narratives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Thomas, Hugh. *The Slave Trade*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997.
- Turnbull, Gordon. *The West-India Planters Vindicated From the Charges of Inhumanity*. London: Printed by Stuart & Stevenson for J Strahan, 1786.
- Turner, Richard Brent. *Islam in the African American Experience*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- Wagner, P.K. "To the Freemen of Louisiana." Editorial. Rpt. in *African Muslims in Antebellum America: A Sourcebook*. Ed. Allan Austin. New York: Garland Publishing, 1984. 213-217.
- Weheliye, Alexander G. *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005.
- Wilks, Ivor. "Salih Bilali of Massina." *Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade*. Ed. Philip Curtin. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1997. 145-151.
- Williams, Heather Andrea. *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.
- Winks, Robin W. "The Making a Fugitive Slave Narrative: Josiah Henson and Uncle Tom—A Case Study." *The Slave's Narrative*. Eds. Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985. 112-146.
- Wise, J. Macgregor. "Home: Territory and Identity." *Animations of Deleuze and Guattari*. Ed. Jennifer Daryl Slack. New York: Peter Lang, 2003. 107-127.
- Wylly, Charles Spalding. *The Seed That Was Sown in the Colony of Georgia: The Harvest and the Aftermath, 1740-1870*. New York: Neale, 1910.