

Constructing the "Wild Arab" in Daniel Defoe's *Captain Singleton* (1720)

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This essay seeks to examine certain passages in Defoe's novel *Captain Singleton* (1720) and to illustrate how the narrator Captain Bob attempts to maintain a stereotypical representation of Arabs ironically by constantly contrasting it with an imagined ideal European model. I hope to show that such a project seems to gradually lack legitimacy because Defoe relies on rhetorical devices rather than real historical facts. Contradictions within the usual Defoean discourse about non-Europeans in general, and of the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula in particular rise throughout the novel. As I will argue later in this essay, the construction of the non-European especially the wild Arab is characterized by the Defoean discourse's rhetorical and ideological contradictions: Defoe insists on presenting this depiction/distortion of the real historical Arab within a European contemporary discourse, which did not necessarily view these desert dwellers in reductive terms. We might begin to approach this topic by first examining the interactions between Captain Singleton and the non-European Other in Africa, Madagascar and later in Arabia proper.

Next, I aim to deconstruct such negative constructions of wild Arabs by comparing/contrasting it with what this essay considers as a more "positive" eighteenth century reverence of the "Noble Bedouins." For many eighteenth-century English and Europeans writers, the desert Bedouins (wild Arabs) represent the gentleman of the desert, a noticeably declining discourse in Europe by the 1720s.

Now, as this was the plot of a few men to see if they could brand me in the world for a Jacobite, and persuade rash and ignorant people that I was turned about for the pretender, I think they might as easily have proved me to be a Mahometan.

Daniel Defoe's "An Appeal: Honour and Justice, though it be of his worst Enemies" (1683).

In his seminal book *Daniel Defoe, a Citizen of the Modern World* (1958), John Robert Moore describes the author of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Captain Singleton* (1720) by explaining that: "Defoe's character is in many ways as remarkable as his books" (342). One cannot but agree with Moore because while reading *Captain Singleton* for example a reader cannot but notice how some of Defoe's anti- non-European and non-Christian rhetoric seems to emanate from what seem to be *uncompromising* ideological positions. Perhaps what is even more remarkable in Defoe's fictional and non-fictional writings is his singular world outlook. In fact, his frequent adherence to propagandist rhetoric about what was happening around him either in England or in Europe sustains different interpretations. For example, whether he was discussing commerce, politics, or religious issues, Daniel Defoe's personality seems to reveal its multidimensional qualities: current day critics can read him as an early advocate of capitalism, as a conservative in politics and as a puritan propagandist. Moreover, Defoe was also an enthusiastic supporter of what seems to be, at least for some current day readers, colonial projects, and imperialistic ventures, especially in the lands of the dark-skinned population of the world.

Furthermore, he also seemed to have developed throughout his career a capacity for absorbing and sometimes recycling different contemporary discourses about non-Europeans. As an Arab and as a Muslim reader of Defoe's fiction and non-fiction, I am interested in rereading Defoe's representation of Arabs and Muslims. The variety of the topics Defoe covered in his writing, his interest in writing about non-European characters lends itself to new readings. As such, reexamining some of his stereotypical projections of the "Other" requires further analysis. Did he for example view both Africans and Arabs with the Chinese, as non-European competitors in trade...? In addition, as a would-be imperialist propagandist, did Defoe actually contribute directly in promoting colonialism, and if so, is he responsible for propagating a discourse which dehumanized Muslims in general and Arabs in particular? As a case in point, in his novel *Captain Singleton* Defoe seems to insist on depicting Arab as wild cutthroats whose only activity in their desert environment is to fight other Arabian tribes or to attack caravans loaded with goods or most importantly to enslave or kill European travelers.

What seems to have driven Defoe to adopt such dehumanizing perspectives about Arabs especially those living in the Arabian Peninsula is what appears to be a project to achieve some kind of comprehensive European racial identity opposite the Other. Furthermore, Defoe tended to rely on certain assumptions, relying for example on the viability of establishing some kind of European counterpart to dark-skinned people outside Europe. Perhaps such discursive construction of the Other appears more clearly while Defoe attempts to construct an imagined wild Arab as a constant threat to European civilization.

Through underlining and critically reading some of Defoe's depictions of Arabs in *Captain Singleton*, reading it within the context of Other and relatively more positive contemporary European discourses, it seems that Defoe reveals rather common but more intense interest the Arabs' role in relation to European travelers. For example, adopting to a certain extent a more racial outlook representing Arabs as more inferior to Other races, Defoe's characterization of Arabs as "wild" beings who roam an arid desert searching for human preys seems to falter when read in its larger context of cultural or commercial rivalry with Europeans. Such a discursive construction of Arabs as wild, placing them opposite the more civilized European becomes more *complicated* if read against Defoe's choice in *Captain Singleton* of usually non-European geographical locations to achieve his ultimate project: the founding of a more integrated European racial and religious identity, in fact more integrated than contemporary European colonial rivalries would allow.

This essay seeks to examine a number of episodes in Defoe's novel *Captain Singleton* and to illustrate how the narrator Captain Bob attempts to maintain stereotypical representation of Arabs ironically by constantly contrasting it with an imagined ideal European model. I hope to show that such a project seems to gradually lack legitimacy because Defoe relies on paradoxical rhetorical structures rather than real historical facts. Contradictions within the usual Defoean discourse about non-Europeans in general, and of Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula in particular show throughout the novel. As I will argue later in this essay, the construction of the non-European especially the wild Arab is characterized by the Defoean discourse's rhetorical and ideological contradictions: Defoe insists on presenting this depiction/distortion of the real historical Arab within a European contemporary discourse, which did not *necessarily* view these desert dwellers in reductive terms. We might begin to approach this topic through first examining the interactions between Captain Singleton and the non-European Other in Africa, Madagascar and later in Arabia proper.

Next, I aim to deconstruct such a negative construction of wild Arabs through comparing/contrasting it with what this essay considers as more "positive" eighteenth century references and allusions of the "Noble Bedouins." For many eighteenth-century English and Europeans writers, desert Bedouins (wild Arabs) represent the gentleman of the desert, a noticeably declining discourse in Europe by the 1720s.

There were available to Defoe more positive contemporary discourses about Arabs, at least those written within a newly emerging English public sphere. However, Defoe seemed to have preferred to adopt a narrower, more personalized and dehumanizing depiction of non-Europeans and non-Christians in general. This tendency to reduce the humanity of Arabs and Muslims to either 'infidel' Turks or 'wild' Arabs testify to Defoe's already entrenched assumptions. In addition, such depiction illustrates that Defoe, very unlike some of his contemporaries, uses the less tolerant discourse about Arabs and Muslims. Such anti-Arab discourse appears frequently in *Captain Singleton* (1720). For example, during the 1720s, English travel books about the Arabs, Middle East were popular. In fact, according to Will and Ariel Durant in their book *The Age of Voltaire: A History of Civilization in Western Europe from 1715-1756, with Special Emphasis on the Conflict between Religion and Philosophy* (1965), "Antoine Galland's translation of the *Arabian Nights*- Mille et une Nuits (1704-17)-had sharpened French interest in Mohammedan life; so had the travelogues of Jean (Sir John) Chardin and Jean Tavernier." In addition, Will and Ariel Durant explain that "from March to July, 1721, the Turkish ambassador treated Paris to the exotic charm of his dress and ways" (341). Such a positive perception of Muslim culture was also apparent in England of 1720; Defoe read and wrote in French, and even traveled there on occasions. Therefore, Defoe was exposed to various discourses about the Muslim Other. At home, however, he continued to accuse King George I's Turkish valets, Mahomet and Mustapha of having a wicked influence on the Hanoverian monarch.

To begin with, what is fascinating about Daniel Defoe's construction of Arabs in *Captain Singleton* (1720) is his apparent insistence on presenting them as wild beings traversing the arid desert of the Arabian Peninsula. However, presenting Arabs merely as wild beings and juxtaposing them with the supposedly more civilized Europeans does not justify Defoe's apparent inability to achieve an all-encompassing European identity opposite the non-European other. In other words, Defoe emphasizes the wildness of Arabs as a rhetorical platform to create what he envisions as a *viabile* European religious and ideological unity. He juxtaposes for example the wild Arab with the would-be united "civilized" Europeans. Contradictions immediately arise

within this Defoean construction due to the impossibility of actualizing an eighteenth-century hegemonic European identity opposite non-Christians. The late Edward Said argues in his book *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) that among Defoe's work *Robinson Crusoe* "is explicitly enabled by an ideology of overseas [British] expansion." However, according to Said *Captain Singleton* is not "single mindedly compelled by the exciting overseas prospects" (70). Said's reading of Crusoe's relationship with an established colonial discourse is rather limited. In other words, Defoe is also eager in *Captain Singleton* to initiate an ideological/colonial project to achieve a more representative European identity. He builds his project for such an imagined identity upon a continual rhetorical contrast with its negation, the non-European other.

In addition, Defoe's demand for an unlikely European collective identity in *Captain Singleton* becomes the ultimate rhetorical variable unachievable due to already existing paradoxes in the European historical conceptions of Arabs and Muslims. Some early and eighteenth-century English writers in fact reveal an ambivalent attitude toward wild Arabs. Some of them admired the nobility of these desert dwellers comparing and contrasting them with the declining gentlemanly manners in European societies. For example, in book IV, *Paradise Lost*, John Milton uses a somewhat typical seventeenth-century representation of Arabia. It is "Araby the Blest," which "delay" a sea traveler "well pleased they slack their course" (119). Milton refers here to the historical city of Sheba in the southern Arabian Peninsula, blessed for its fertile land. Milton's image of Arabia as a blest land underlines an apparent fascination with its historical importance especially in the Bible. Such interest in Arabia took other forms of appreciation. During the seventeenth century, Cambridge University established the Adams Professorship in the Arabic language, followed by the Laudian Professorship in Arabic at Oxford in 1636. One cannot separate interest in Arabic culture and literature from what happens later during the eighteenth century. Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, for instance, was published just one year after the publication of *Captain Singleton* in 1720. Such interest in Arabia, the Middle East and Islam in general seemed to have generated different positive and negative European historical and literary debates about the non-European Other. Defoe was an avid reader of history and must have been exposed to such writings. He actually imitated the eighteenth-century contemporary literary fashion of writing 'histories' such as his *Continuation of Turkish Letters Written by a Turkish Spy in Paris* (1718).

Defoe, well known as an early eighteenth-century political propagandist, a social commentator, and a would-be economic theorist, seems to borrow his basic assumptions about Arabs from an already established racial European rhetoric. Within the contemporary English public sphere, for exam-

ple one can read about the history of Commander Joao De Castro in Samuel Purchas' "Purchas his Pilgrims" (1625). Samuel Purchas (1575?-1626), a well-known English travel writer quotes De Castro (1500-1548), an early sixteenth-century Portuguese naval commander. He writes:

The bedoies are wild men, amongst whom is no civil societe, no truth nor civilities used: they worship Mahomet, and are very bad Moores, above all Other people they are given to stealths and Rabine; they eate raw flesh, and drinke milke; their habit is vile and filthy, they are greatly endued with swiftnesse and nimblenesses; they fight on foote and horse-backe, their weapons are Darts, they never have peace with their Neighbours, but continually have warre, and fight with every one [sic]" (12).

Historically known as "Bedouins," the wild Arabs inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula-Defoe refers to them in *Captain Singleton* as wild Arabs. Yet for De Castro these desert dwellers continued to be Muslims, which the sixteenth-century Portuguese commander considers as the ultimate Enemies of Christianity. It is understandable that De Castro who fought Muslims may form very negative impressions about the Arabs because he was directly involved in war against them. De Castro was a Portuguese naval commander who fought Muslim pirates in Portuguese India in 1545. He also "defeated Mahmud Shah III, King of Gujarat, relieved city of Diu; subdued Malaca" (Webster's Biographical Dictionary 266). In addition, perhaps De Castro's discourse represents an earlier European attempt to construct wild Arabs, subhuman raw flesh-eating creatures. Defoe borrows a similar dehumanizing discourse.

There were of course other and perhaps less dehumanizing discourses about Arabs and Muslims in European writings of the sixteenth century. Therefore, Defoe might have had direct access to "Purchas his Pilgrims" and to other more positive depictions. For example, though it was uncommon to read in early eighteenth-century travel writings more *positive* commentary about Arabs, however such discourses were also available in the English public sphere. Indeed, to some English contemporaries of Defoe, Bedouins or *wild* Arabs represent an ideal model for somewhat declining moral values: the Gentleman Bedouin.

For instance, writing in 1712, less than a decade before the publication of *Captain Singleton*, Captain Woodes Rogers, a famous English sea captain and author, describes the good manners of Arabs in his book *A Cruising Voyage around the World: the Adventures of an English Privateer*. Rogers in fact during one of his voyages (1708 to 1711) rescued a Scottish seaman named Alexander Selkirk He writes in *A Cruising Voyage*, "the wild Arab....will

traverse burning sand barefooted, to receive the last breath of some kind relation or friend." Moreover, he describes them as very loyal to their friends and relatives. Arabs, according to Captain Rogers, are courageous people and the "boldest people in the world." He adds that Arabs behave like gentlemen. According to Rogers, they are "endued with a tenderness quite poetic and their kindness extend to the brute creation by which they are surrounded" (14). Robert Moore in his book *Defoe in the Pillory and Other Studies* (1939) argues that it is "extremely likely" that Rogers and Defoe might have met (144).

On the one hand, earlier literary depictions of Arabs and Muslims in English literature included various representations; an exaggerated discourse in which the non-European other becomes subhuman. On the other hand, other fictional representations of Arabs and Muslims would have provided Defoe with an array of more positive depictions of these natives of Arabia. For example, though William Shakespeare in *Othello* creates an imaginary Moorish he cur; whose exoticism seems to appeal to European around him, yet he also depicts him as a sympathetic and tragic figure. What is more interesting here is that Shakespeare who was writing during an age which experienced Fewer European and Muslim interactions than in the eighteenth century constructs Othello as a more humane character than one can find in *Captain Singleton* with its wild Arabs.

According to Joel Reed's entry "Exoticism," in *Britain in the Hanoverian Age: 1714-1837, An Encyclopedia* (1997) stories about "Turkish Harems fulfilled English desire for transgressive eroticism." Such stories Reed explains, "while fueling condemnation of the Turk's treatment of women." Reed explains further that such treatment of the exotic Eastern subject in English literature during the Hanoverian period underlines a "complex desire and denial operated on narratives from the South Pacific: accounts of native sexuality around some English writers and readers " (240). Such interest in Eastern fictional subjects may also be linked to earlier medieval romances in which the non-European other, especially Muslims, is dehumanized because they represented the ultimate enemies of Christianity.

There were of course less sympathetic contemporary English writers who, like the sixteenth century Portuguese De Castro, insisted on representing the Arabs as less human than Europeans. Simon Ockley (1678-1720) for example in his popular *The History of the Saracens; Comprising the Lives of Mohammed and His Successors, to the Death of Abdalmelik, the Eleventh Caliph* (1708-1718), took, just like Defoe, a more determinate view very similar to De Castro's.

Writing more an Arabic historical romance manuscript than a real history, Ockley explains that Arabs before Islam "were always a warlike people, seldom being at peace either with one another or their neighbours [sic]" (xvii). He adds that Arabs are but "jarring tribes" united by the prophet in "the profession of the new superstition [Islam]" (xvii). Ockley like many of his contemporaries had no tangible information about Islam or Arabic culture. Most of his information about Arabs and Islam seems to have come through reading fictional and imaginary Arabic and translated works, rather than real historical accounts. Said argues in *Orientalism* "that Orient was almost a European invention." He explains that it "had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (1991). As in the case of Defoe later, one cannot ignore the underlining religious ideology behind Ockley's description of Arabs as wild people and 'infidels' having no peace with themselves and with their neighbours [sic]. Interestingly enough, in 1710 Ockley became the Vicar of Swavesey (Cambridgeshire-England).

The narrator of Defoe's novel *Captain Singleton* or Captain Bob as he is sometimes called by his pirate comrades had not actually met face to face with any wild Arab at the beginning of the novel. His initial information about them comes through others in the form of rumors and largely unfounded assumptions. For example, he starts hearing about the reported savagery or wildness of Arabs in Madagascar. While contemplating what they should do next one of Captain Bob's pirate companions (a Portuguese Gunner) tells his compatriot the Cutler, while Singleton is listening that if they "had been in the Red Sea in a Malabar sloop [instead of Madagascar]...we should either be killed by the wild Arabs, or taken and made slaves by the Turks" (29). Being the first mention of Arabs in the novel, the adjective "Wild" seems to set the tone for future representations of Arabs in the novel.

The Red Sea, which constitutes the eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula, divides the wilderness of Arabia with Africa. Captain Bob experiences, later in the novel, the reported 'wildness' in the form of savage Africans and wild Arabs. However, it becomes easy to deal with the African natives; Captain Bob and his comrades can manipulate their supposed savagery by simply offering them some trivial metal and shiny objects. Yet, it becomes more challenging for the pirates to deal with those wild and unpredictable Arabs in Arabia. Their wildness, cunning and unpredictability gradually become overt, real and tangible challenges for Captain Bob's pirate comrades. Moreover, the fear of the wild Arab underlines a deeper concern about how to control them.

Furthermore, it is important to remember that Defoe himself might not even have met any Arabs during his lifetime. His only reported encounter with

Muslims in fact might have been with George I's Turkish valets, Mustapha and Mahomet who actually converted to Christianity before they arrive with the Hanoverian to England in 1714. These Turks were captured while they were young by the elector of Hanover during his battle against the Ottomans. They continued to serve him in England as his personal valets. In fact, in some of his propagandist pamphlets he describes these two Turkish servants as having negative influence on the king.

Writing in his pamphlet "Considerations on the State of Affairs of Great Britain" (1718), Defoe condemns George I for keeping these two Turkish servants. For Defoe, as for some of his contemporaries Arab, Turks and almost any non-Christian around a European Monarch will serve no Other than "abominable purpose[s]" (Backsheider 385). Furthermore, in his famous "Tract against the Turks" Defoe elaborates on an earlier opposition to the Whig's support of Turkish victories in Europe:

The first time I had the Misfortune to differ with my friends, was about the Year 1683, when the Turks were besieging Vienna, and the Whigs in England, generally speaking, were for the Turks taking it; which I having read the History of Cruelty and perfidious Dealings of the Turks in their Wars, and how they had rooted the Name of Christian Religion in above threescore and Ten Kingdoms" (Novak 64).

Ultimately, what seems to stimulate Defoe less tolerant depiction for Muslims in general and his insistence to present Arabs as wild creatures seems to be his fundamental reliance on religious and racial similarities among Europeans. In Other words, whenever Defoe depicts a non-European Other in his fictional and nonfiction writings he tends to juxtapose his supposedly inhuman identity with the more humane and civilized white European. Yet, Captain Singleton's experience with the other European pirates exposes cultural and political contradictions among them. They become comrades because of necessity not by choice.

John Peck in his book *Maritime Fiction: Sailors and the Sea in British and American Novels 1719-1917*, (2001) underlines an important characteristic of Defoe's maritime discourse. He argues that Defoe tends to represent the pirate as "a dangerous figure of otherness" (20). Peck recognizes however that Singleton's journey is "a symbolic voyage, with the kind of religious echoes," involving, "the relationship of racial and colonial superiority." Peck explains that "after Bob's return to England (in 1686), when he loses the money he has made in Africa... [he abandons] the kind of religious language that has previously been a feature of the text" (21). Yet, what seems to drive Defoe's negative depictions of non-Europeans goes deeper than the

self-interest of his characters. The *dehumanizing* discourse against the non-European Other continues in Defoe's novel, apparently unabated. For example, after arriving in Madagascar, Captain Singleton's comrades "perform" a "Voyage" around the Western coast of Africa (39). They "went on Shore several times for Water and Provisions." The "Native always very free and courteous," yet the pirates are more concerned with capturing an "Arabian Vessel," than settling in "Mosambique or Zanguebar" (39). Wishing to capture an Arabian vessel would have encouraged Captain Singleton to "get into the Arabian Gulph, or the Mouth of the Red sea, and waiting for some Vessel passing, or repassing there [sic]" (49). Such Defoean desire to project the Arabs as the ultimate enemy of Captain Singleton and perhaps, to borrow from Peck's *Maritime Fiction*, a "dangerous figure of otherness"(20).

Maximillian Novak in his book *Daniel Defoe: Master of Fictions* (2001) points out an important characteristic of Defoe's writing, that is its autobiographical nature. Novak comments that in "*Captain Singleton*...in terms of an imaginative projection of his own divided ego, he [Defoe] never came so close as the combination of Singleton and Williams" (583). Novak is referring here to the Quaker Williams who becomes Captain Singleton's spiritual guide and later brother-in-law. Novak might have been referring here, at least implicitly, to the paradoxical discourses that Defoe actually deploys in his novel. His economic discourses about trade and commerce are never free from ideological intentions. In other words, he tends to entertain different discourses about one subject: the wild Arab for example represents an enemy to Europeans, yet later in the novel, we read about Captain Bob and William taking refuge in an Arab town. Whether one agrees with Novak's that such tendency of the imaginative projection in Defoe's writing reflect to some extent his "divided ego," suffice to argue here that he never comes closer to projecting such egoistic divisions as when he represents Arabs and Muslims.

What seems to underline Captain Singleton's fear of wild Arabs is their intractability and resistance to European imperialism. It was relatively easy for Singleton and his comrades to control any of the Africans they captured during their journey into Africa. In fact, they seemed to have found many of these Africans quite controllable. The African slaves they use to carry their loads of food, gold are very unlike the wild and unpredictable Arab who seems to have become the ultimate threat to the pirates. Just to illustrate further; using their black "prince" a warrior they captured at the beginning of the journey into the African heartland, Captain Singleton's comrades "ordered them [Other African prisoners of war] to be tied two by two by the wrist." The black prince is a prisoner of war used by the pirates to control other Africans. He helps them turn the slaves into becoming "sensible of the reasonableness

of it, that he made them do it themselves" (64). Roxann Wheeler in her book *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (2000) explains, "the African inhabitant in *Captain Singleton* all live in primitive, isolated bunches with little discernible government." Moreover, according to Wheeler "there are no challenging trade negotiations, and there is no questions that the Europeans are in charge" (108). Wheeler underlines here the apparent Defoean construction of Africans. The African natives fully depend, even in controlling other African prisoners, on the apparently more intelligent European pirate. Such reductive depictions of the childish African Other correspond to later Defoean representations of wild Arabs as less human and less civil than Europeans.

Yet such a prospect of *friendly* relations with the natives does not seem to apply to the wild Arab. He continues to be a threat rather than an amiable prisoner of war. In fact, the African slaves became so docile that after allocating "about 30 to 40 Pound Weight to a Man...the Negroes did not all repine at it, but would sometimes help one another when they began to be weary" (68). Captain Bob would not have expected such submissive behavior from wild Arabs.

Defoe represents the African Other as childish, submissive and easy to control. This docility of the native toward the European appears in *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). For example, in their first encounter, Friday "kneel'd down" and "kiss'd the Ground and laid his Head upon the Ground." Friday takes Crusoe by "the Foot, set my Foot upon his Head." Crusoe interprets this gesture as a "token of swearing to be my Slave for ever" (159)! Captain Singleton might have expected such submission from the natives in Africa, yet it is difficult to achieve with wild Arabs.

Moreover, unlike earlier examples of Rogers' and others, Defoe tends to adopt a more determinate cultural outlook, usually negative, about non-Christians. Defoe like a few of his contemporaries, and very much like early anti-Muslim generations of English and European writers, believed that Arabs, because they are Muslims (Mohammedans) are more like subhumans.

In addition, Defoe intentionally chooses Africa and Asia as suitable geographical locations to construct what he perceives as achievable comprehensive European identity. He places this obviously unachievable European unity against Arabs. During his early travels, Captain Singleton happens to be marooned in Madagascar with his "fellow-criminals" (13). During their stay on the Island, the pirates spot an Arabian "vessel which had been trading to the coast of Mosambique, or Zannuebar [sic]." Though they come very close to meeting real Arabs, such close encounter however does not allow the pirates to capture the Arabian vessel because they "lost Sight of it" (39). In addition,

though Captain Bob and his comrades fail to capture the first Arabian ship they meet, the Arab Other continues to preoccupy their minds. Such preoccupation with Arabs adds a new level of a dehumanizing discourse against all non-Christians.

For example, earlier in the novel we hear Captain Singleton contrasts the "ignorant, ravenous, brutish" natives of Madagascar with his fellow white pirates (13). Such a negative designation of those African natives includes all other non-Europeans. The figure, culture and symbolic value of the non-European other constitute for Singleton whatever is non-white and usually non-Christian. Yet what is remarkable about this projection of the non-European in *Captain Singleton* is that Defoe uses it as a convenient rhetorical device primarily to underline the superiority of the white race. However, when the situation demands it, Defoe exchanges the Arab with the Catholic Portuguese. In fact, the Arab in the Defoean discourse seems to occupy an ambivalent position; he can sometimes become an ally, and not necessarily an enemy.

For example, while cruising in the Arabian Gulf, Singleton and William escape from their comrades "never intended to see any more." Curiously, they sail to Basra, a city in the south of current-day Iraq. When they arrive in "Balsara [sic]" they start trading with the native Arab population "three or four Days, landing....the whole Cargoe, that was of any considerable value [sic]" (262). What is interesting to notice here is that after presenting the Arabs as wild, yet, Captain Bob finds refuge in the Arabian Gulf, the eastern natural sea border of Arabia. In addition, Captain Bob sells these Arabs the goods and merchandise he and William took away from their comrades. Actually, it is from this particular Arab geographical location (Basra-Iraq) that he and William depart on a long journey to England. Defoe seems to renegotiate his earlier project of creating a comprehensive European identity opposite the non-European other. However, he also exchanges Captain Singleton's earlier biased discourse against Arabs with a more conciliatory tone. Therefore, the Wild Arab roaming around the arid Arabian desert constantly threatening Europeans transforms into a viable business partner in Basra.

The Arab whether being one of the native population of Basra or in any Other Arab village or town Singleton visits or finds in wild deserts seems to constitute for him and his runaway comrade an ambivalent character according to Singleton. One, can pass among these Arabs as "Merchants of Persia" being "perfectly secured at Bassaro [sic]" (263). Singleton actually achieves "Repentance" in Bassaro (Basra) (265). Manuel Schonhorn in his "Defoe: The Literature of Politics and the Politics of Some Fictions" underscores Defoe's ambivalence toward political, religious and social organization of his

day. He points out that in "Reflection upon the Great Revolution, written by a Lady hand in the Country" (1689) Defoe constantly adapts his politic rhetoric according to his needs. For example, while justifying the legitimacy of passive disobedience during the English revolution, Defoe according to Schonhorn "in the very next breath," can "turn around and insist that no general rule can be derived from biblical injunctions" (16). Defoe's ability to generate dehumanizing images of non-Europeans is exchanged in Basra with apparent acceptance of their racial and cultural difference. Captain Bob can, within a single breath, reconsider his earlier animosity toward Arabs and start treating them as potential business partners.

Previously, if Captain Bob and William would have fallen in the hands of the 'wild' Arabs "all we would hope for there [in the Mediterranean], was to be taken by the Arabs, and be sold for slaves to the Turks, which to all of us was little better than Death" (49). Such fear of Arabs seemed to have driven Singleton to propose another "Enterprize" and instead of crossing Africa on foot, they should "get into the Arabian Gulph, or the Mouth of the Red sea" (49). His plan included "waiting for some vessel passing...seized upon the first we came at...but they [his comrades] were all positive [against the action]...so [he] submitted" to his comrade's plan to a "March of 2 or 3000 Miles on Foot....among lions and Tygers [Africa]" (50). Yet, this ambivalence in dealing with the Arabs seemed to borrow from previous depictions of Arabs as crafty, just like foxes. However, such threats of attacking Arabs do not materialize. Instead, as we read later in the novel, Captain Bob and his Quaker William find refuge north of the Arabian Gulf in the city of Basra. Nevertheless, Defoe's general commentary on Arabs continually recalls dehumanizing discourses about them adopted earlier by some English travel writers.

For example, writing about his travels from 1614-1621, William Lithgow documents his journeys in "Rare Adventures and Painful Peregrinations." He visited Switzerland, Bohemia, Palestine, Egypt, Tunis, and Malaga. Yet for Lithgow as for Defoe a century later the Arab remains a troublesome Other whom Europeans should not trust: "the nature of the Arabs is not unlike to the Jackles; for when any of them hear the shot of a harquebuss, [sic] they presently turn back with such speed, as if the fiends of the infernal court were broken loose at their heels" (11).

The harquebus Lithgow refers to above is the 16 th century portable matchlock gun, used in contemporary battles. However, what is ironic in Lithgow's description of Arabs as Jackals lay in its value in ancient Arab culture. Bedouins usually consider this animal as intelligent and smart while pursuing its prey. They actually imitate its maneuvers in hunting and consider its craftiness as a desirable quality in desert warriors. Moreover, the Jackal

according to the *21st Century Webster's International Encyclopedia* is a "carnivorous mammal (genus *Canus*) closely related to dogs and wolves [It hunts] and kill birds, hares, mice, and insects" (586). These animals were and still are quite common in the Arabian deserts in current day the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Egypt. As an early seventeenth-century travel writer, William Lithgow might not have had enough information about the symbolic value of Jackals in Arabia.

Furthermore, classical Arabic for example designates the Jackal as "Ibn Awa." The term literary means "the son of Awa," well known for its 'cunning', 'cleverness' and its ability to start sudden attacks. Such characteristics were historically associated with desert Bedouins, and even celebrated in their tribal poetry. Like almost any native people, Arab warriors adopted some of the tactical behaviors of the animals in their environment while fighting with Other Arab tribes. Lithgow refers to that skill in war when he describes how Arabs are able to fight and run as swiftly as Jackals.

Nevertheless, reducing the humanity of the Arab or non-Christian into animals or savages seems to derive from deep-seated contemporary Eurocentric perceptions of the outside world. Such fundamental and determinate racist perceptions continued into the eighteenth century. Defoe however extends his dehumanizing discourse to include Africans. During one of their journeys around the southeastern coastline of South America, Singleton and his fellow pirates discover a ship "about the Rio de la Plata." According to Captain Singleton's narration the pirates were amazed because the ship "stood directly toward us" (155), apparently unguided. After they approach the ship they find out that the ghost ship is full of "600 Negroes, Men and Women, Boys and Girls, and not one Christian, or *white* Man [emphasis added] on board [sic]" (156). After the pirates succeed in communicating with the African slaves, they discover that a few days earlier one of the white French sailors "abused the Negroe Man's wife, and afterwards his 16 years old] daughter." The African husband knocked the Frenchman's "Brain out at one Blow" (162). The slaves free themselves from their white oppressors, but were unable to steer the ship. However, as an afterthought Singleton reminds us: "the two white Men [guarding the Round-house of the ship] killed eleven of their Men before they [African slaves] break in" (162). For Defoe, whites, whether French, English or otherwise besides being mentally superior to Africans and Arabs are also physically more powerful.

Defoe does not point out the dehumanizing nature of these actions against the African prisoners, though they were perhaps sexually abused by the white slave traders. Instead, he celebrates the physical superiority of those predatory French sailors. He insists for example in emphasizing their

superiority in masculinity and courage. Moreover, ignoring the psychological impact of sexual abuse of a teenage African girl seems to imply that Defoe does not consider her rape by those French sailors as morally reprehensible. Justifying such acts of what is fundamentally sexual abuse of children points out Defoe's belief in racial superiority of whites against nonwhites. Chinua Achebe in his famous article "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" points out a typical representation of Africans in the Western mind. He argues that there "is the desire-one might indeed say the need- in Western psychology to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar." Achebe is underlining here what he perceives as "Europe's own state of spiritual grace", compared with that of Africa (252). Defoe, unlike Conrad, does not attempt to mitigate his negative depictions of the African native as subhuman, but explicitly juxtaposes him to even white pirates. While doing so, he continually attempts to maintain a faint hope of creating a somewhat more inclusive racial identity opposite non-Europeans. However, this Defoean colonial rhetoric is used primarily to construct a European identity collapses in the face of already entrenched religious and ideological differences among eighteenth-century Europeans.

Defoe locates such chauvinistic depictions of Europeans in general in opposition to non-whites within a larger eccentric racial project. He hopes to create a more common identity, which differentiates non-Europeans for other lesser humans. In his novel for example as well as in many of his fictional and nonfiction writings Defoe reveals a desire to *reshape* contemporary European hostilities within one singular identity, Caucasian in general and Christian in particular. However, he does not achieve this European unity due to past and contemporary ideological and military struggles among the Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, French, and English since the sixteenth century.

Historically, Defoe was working within a paradoxical European political scene. Most eighteenth-century European monarchies were competing in different commercial, religious, and military domains. Within such "warring" climate, it was virtually impossible even to imagine achieving any lasting European peace, leave alone solidifying one particular identity representing all Europeans. The revoking of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV in 1685, the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-1714) and the North American rivalries between the French, the English and the Spaniards seemed to have hindered the prospects of any achievable project of a would-be cosmopolitan European community. Particularly during the eighteenth-century, European rivalry on economic, imperialistic, and political fronts seemed to have intensified. In fact, the European political scene was being reshaped due to military defeats and victories like in the case of The Great Northern War (1700-1721). This last

war resulted in Sweden failing to keep almost all its colonial holdings, ceasing afterward to be a major European power.

By the time of the composition of *Captain Singleton* (1720), economic conditions in England itself took a heavy fall due to the South Sea Company crash, initiating an unprecedented drop in the prices of English stocks. Such an enormous economic collapse led to various social, political, and even social changes in England. It seems that Defoe, the ultimate eighteenth-century political and religious propagandist, wanted somehow to divert attention from what was happening in his English locale through depicting non-Christians, like wild Arabs as less human. During 1714-1720, England also witnessed serious political challenges to the newly installed Hanoverian regime. For example, the Jacobites continued to threaten the new Hanoverian monarchy. According William Laprade in his book *Public Opinion and Politics in Eighteenth-Century England to the Fall of Walpole* (1963), King George the first had "scarce any prospect... of extricating himself out of these difficulties into which northern affairs[...] had plunged him." Laprade is referring here to contemporary European affairs like "considering the obstinacy and inveteracy of the King of Sweden, the poverty and weakness of the court of Denmark, the treachery and corruption of Prussia, and the little probability of any cordial and effectual assistance from the Emperor [Roman Emperor]" (198-199). What is remarkable here is that within such apparently unstable European and English political scenes, Defoe attempts to juxtapose the wild Arab Other with the supposedly more civilized Europeans. His attempts however to use racial and political polemic against Muslims in general and Arab in particular does not succeed due to rooted contradictions within such a dehumanizing discourse.

For example, contemporary European rivalry seems to have changed Defoe's mind during the composition of *Captain Singleton*. Earlier in his career, Captain Bob for example abhorred the "abandon'd Vileness of the Portuguese" that he could not but "hate them most heartily from the beginning" (7). Yet after participating in a "Mutiny" upon a Portuguese ship," he is left in Madagascar (10). He departs to the African coast and decides to cross Africa on foot with his new Portuguese comrades. After spending almost two years on this journey, he comes to the realization that his comrades are but "scoundrels the Portuguese, a Nation I had an original Aversion to" (150). His hostility against the Portuguese stems from his inability to find common ground with them even though they crossed Africa together.

Captain Bob initially accepts either by necessity or by personal choice his comradeship with other Europeans. Yet, when he chooses a different path, relinquishing piracy and returning to England, he immediately changes

his views toward his Portuguese comrades. In other words, what seems to govern Captain Singleton's consciousness about his shared values with other Europeans is self-interest. When this his personal interest does not materialize in a stable life or good financial prospect, he immediately renounces his initial project: enjoying a common racial identity with the Portuguese.

Defoe in addition to distorting the Arab and African identities by removing them from the human family as savages, brutes and wild men, does not succeed in achieving however a shared Eurocentric psyche. This European Defoean conception of shared values and objectives does not function as a viable project due to already entrenched ideological contradictions among Europeans themselves. Such inability to see through a united Europe opposite the non-European other usually happens on foreign non-European geographical locations. Whether such European companionship actualizes because Defoe places it opposite the wild Arab or the savage African, it eventually loses viability. Whenever and wherever he initiates such far-fetched project to unite Europe in the face of the dark-skinned Other, somehow Defoe is doomed to remind his main characters of those "scoundrels the Portuguese" (150). Europeans supposedly share enough values and similar ways of thinking, which puts them in a viable and legitimate contrast with the non-European Other; however what underlines such assumptions is that such wishful thinking must always happen on foreign soil, not in Europe proper. In other words, Defoe in *Captain Singleton* must have found it quite easy to negotiate an imagined European identity upon non-European soil. Thus, the non-Christian and non-European Others, their lands, languages and cultures transform through Defoe's reconstructive effort into free spaces on /in which almost anything can happen.

Furthermore, as Singleton attempts to locate such a construction of European unity among the supposedly savage races of Africa or Arabia he cannot discover a common ground among European themselves. For example, during the long journey through Africa and after facing together various challenges from harsh weather, voracious animals, and hostile natives, Singleton's dream of a unified European front in the face of the non-European Other crumbles. As soon as the pirates reach the "Portuguese Factories, near Gambia" European comradeship seemed to have almost ended (137). What remains afterwards is scoundrel Portuguese.

Defoe intentionally *dehumanized* the Arabs in his novel by reiterating their "wild" nature. However, he also tried to transform them into prey. Captain Bob's second encounter with Arabs happens on "the Arabian Coast" standing by the Arabian shore, when the pirates "spy'd a Sail [sic], and gave her chase" (174). It proved to be "poor Prize," because they find instead:

"half-naked Turks going a Pilgrimage to Mecca, to the Tomb of their Prophet Mahomet [sic]" The condition of these Muslim pilgrimages is pitiful. They "had no one thing worth taking away, but a little Rice, and some Coffee, which was all the poor Wretches, had for their Subsistence" (174). What Captain Singleton has encountered might have been Arabs. Turks did not usually live on the Arabian coast during the eighteenth-century. Turks actually existed on the Gulf coast only in their military capacity as soldiers of the Ottoman Empire and not half-naked Pilgrims to Mecca. Like many Other contemporary European writers, Defoe tended to *blur* the differences between non-European races. He did not care to explain to his readers the difference between Turks and Arabs. What seemed to have mattered more for Defoe is to depict Muslims as subhumans, or poor victims of piracy roaming the seas half-naked. In fact, the half-naked Turks would not have been Turkish by race, but certainly wild Arabs from the northern parts of the Arabian Peninsula. They might have been early Kuwaitis.

What is interesting in the controversial Defoean construction of Muslims and Arabs is that it fluctuates within the novel's narrative. For example, earlier in the novel, Arabs seemed to have constituted a common threat to Captain Bob and his comrades. He tries to persuade a Captain Wilmot not to leave the Persian Gulf alone. He actually demonstrates to him the real threat he will be facing if he leaves alone. He argues against Wilmot's plan and attempts to explain "the Hazards he would run" into facing "Thieves and Murtherers in the Red Sea, who would never let such a Treasure as his as pass their Hands [sic]" (183). Yet, toward the end of the novel, Defoe chooses Arabia (land area between the Red sea and the Arabian Gulf) as the best sanctuary for Captain Singleton and his friend William the Quaker when they decide to abscond from their pirate comrades. They hide for some time in the current day Iraqi town of Basra, before finally departing to England.

Dramatically adapting his chauvinistic outlook to suit his self-interest, Captain Bob seems to drop his ultimate priority of a comprehensive European identity, for the sake of achieving personal security. For example, he finds a safe haven in the southeastern part of Arabia in Basra. From that remote Arabian location, he journeys back through those arid Arabian deserts until he finds passage to England. Such Defoean ambivalent discursive transformation, manipulating the Arab Other as both an enemy and a viable ally points to the nature of the discourse Defoe usually uses to depict non-Europeans. Depending on the strategic value of establishing successful relationships with non-Europeans, they, the Eastern Others constitute mere rhetorical devices. They, Arabs for example, can transform into protectors of Captain Bob rather than being his deadly enemies.

What characterizes Defoe's construction of Arabs in particular is that he attempts to negotiate an imagined European comprehensive identity while dehumanizing Arabs. Depicted as wild, the Arabs come to represent for Defoe the inferiority and wildness of non-Europeans. Nevertheless, the Defoean construction does not hold through *Captain Singleton* because he seems to base it on faulty assumptions about discovering some kind ideological or religious common grounds among Europeans. Such a European unifying project also does not materialize because Defoe chooses to construct such a common European identity against the savagery of the non-European Other on foreign land, Africa, Arabia...etc.

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