

The Existence (or Nonexistence) of *Libertalia*

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The story of *Libertalia* is one of those by which reality and fantasy are married, and even the mystery of whether this pirate utopia ever existed is not as thrilling as the story of the utopia itself, real or imaginary. Though perhaps a figment of Captain Charles Johnson's vivid imagination, the development and reformative thought behind *Libertalia*'s invention are still worth noting in the general study of pirate history, and history as a whole, because *Libertalia*'s existence, or nonexistence, echoes a trend in piratical governments and conceptual understanding of equality, economics, and power dynamics. These can also serve to shine light on the civil societies of the time, and the contextual reasons for reformist pirate governments being developed.

The development of what we will assume to be, for now, Captain Charles Johnson's *invention* of the story of *Libertalia* and its founder, Captain Misson, is in itself a puzzling venture. Captain Johnson is widely understood to be an accurate and reliable historian on piratical biographies. Biographer Philip Gosse in his 1924 book, "The Pirates' Who's Who," vouches for Johnson's accuracy and the likelihood of his having first-hand experience as either a seaman or pirate himself (Gosse, 13). David Cordingly in 1996 confirms Johnson's "familiarity with the use of seaman's language," (xix) and Manuel Schonhorn praises Johnson's consistency with more modern academic research regarding Madagascar piracy (xxxix). It seems odd, in consequence, that although modern historians of piracy have a generally high regard for the accuracy of Johnson's accounts as a primary source, Angus Konstam stating that "much of what he wrote about pirates of the golden age of piracy was substantially accurate" (109), it is an almost unanimous belief among historians that one chapter of Johnson's second book, *A General History of the Pyrates*, is completely apocryphal (Comegna).

Why Johnson may have inserted this fictional narrative into his book is a question for which the answer is still debated. When it was widely believed within the field that Captain Johnson was a pseudonym for Daniel Defoe, author of *Robinson Crusoe*, the insertion of a thrilling adventure into the historical text seemed at least to make some sense, however the more modern evidence against Defoe's relation to Johnson left historians no closer to identifying Johnson's intentions. Some believe the account to be motivated by Johnson's wish to increase sales for his second book, and others believe the chapter to be a disguised essay of Captain Johnson's own political ideals (Schonhorn, xxxvii).

In an attempt to avoid assaulting the reader with a surplus of disclaimers, the biographical accounts of the players in *Libertalia*'s creation and the historical account of *Libertalia* itself, as have been defined by Captain Johnson's *History*, will be recounted in the following pages as they were written by Johnson, regardless of whether they may be real or imaginary.

Brief Biography of the Sailors who Founded Libertalia

Captain Misson had no first name, or at least, no first name that was divulged by Captain Charles Johnson in his second biographical account of golden age piracy, *A General History of the Pyrates*, and may very well have had no last name or even existed at all. Between Johnson's account and now, Misson has been given the first name Olivier, or occasionally James, though by what means these names appeared is unclear.

Misson, who lived during the 17th century, was one of few pirates who received an education, having been born into a wealthy family in Provencal France. Despite his family's wealth, Misson was one of many children and thus his own future fortune was not secure, so at 15, being sent to Angiers for the conclusion of his education, Misson chose a life at sea over his father's wish for him to join the musketeers. Aided by his father's resources, Misson became a sailor aboard the *Victoire*, which offered him the freedom to cruise the Mediterranean and solidify his adoration for the life of a sailor. Having obtained leave from his captain to visit Rome while the *Victoire* was anchored in Naples, he met a man who Johnson describes as a "lewd priest," one who scorned organized religion and the oppressive power dynamic of self-interested scholars and aristocrats (3).

This man, Signior Caraccioli, became acquainted with Misson first as his confessor. After realizing that Misson had developed a similar view of power inequalities due to seeing the lavish lives of clergymen in Rome, the two became fast friends, and remained so until his death. Caraccioli found Misson a willing convert to his personal doctrine of Deism and equality, and decided to join the same crew in which Misson was enlisted. Both Misson and Caraccioli proved themselves to be able fighters during a desperate scrap between the *Victoire* and a Sallee pirate ship, and again in their next voyage on the privateer ship *Triumph*, followed by a series of sea battles and voyages (which captain Johnson recounts in extreme detail despite a lack of influence on the arc of Misson's story, if it is a fantastical narrative).

Returning to the *Victoire* as she voyaged for the West Indies, Caraccioli and Misson continued to share ideas with each other and the rest of the crew, and concepts of equality and natural rights became essentially unanimous beliefs onboard. Between Rochelle and the West Indies, offshore of Martinico, the *Victoire* had a fateful encounter with the English Man of War, *Winchester* (or *Winchelsea*), during which the *Victoire*'s captain Fourbin and three of his officers were killed in the process of sinking the English opponent. This engagement left the *Victoire* captainless, and Signior Caraccioli was quick to step forward; In what seems to be a recurring cliché of history, Caraccioli roused the crew with an "eloquent address to Misson (Gosse, 213)," citing Alexander the Great, Mahomet (Mehmed II), Darius, and King Henry IV, historical figures who, with few men but grand ideas, righteously took command and established their newly planned and led societies.

He invited Misson to take captaincy of the *Victoire*, and Misson's speech in response, a "triumph of oratory (Gosse, 214)" that championed liberty, justice, and equality, raised a unanimous cry among the crew: "*Vive le Capitain Misson et son Lieutenant le Scavant Caraccioli!*" (Johnson, 12). This cheer honoring Misson and Caraccioli was a declaration of

fealty, and Misson thanked the crew with an oath to use his power for public good, and fight with the same bravery that the crew showed by defending the ideals of liberty. He promised that all of his leadership as captain would be advised and preserved by his crew, and that except when “the necessity of affairs should oblige him,” he would make decisions as a companion and comrade to the crew (Johnson, 13).

Historical Basis for Libertalia

In his first speech as captain, one that biographer Philip Gosse calls the beginning of an entire “era of speechmaking,” Caraccioli and then Misson set precedents for the government and conceptual foundation of their new society (212). Caraccioli established in his address the parallels between Libertalia (though it had not been named yet) and historical examples of individuals who showed characteristics he wanted Libertalia to exhibit. In the correlation of Misson to Alexander the Great, Caraccioli likely meant to parallel Misson’s potential reactionary ascent to captaincy after the death of Fourbin with Alexander immediately taking up his father’s plans for imperial conquest after Philip II was killed in battle. This comparison, whether intended as such by Johnson or not, is ironic, considering Alexander led his Macedonian army to establish sovereignty over the previously Democratic states of Athens and Thebes, despite doing so by virtue of his strategic talent, the trait that Caraccioli was probably intending to credit in his speech (Roos).

It seems excessive to explain as well the stories of Mehmed, Darius, King Henry IV and VII, beyond affirming that every one of them rose to power through conspiracies or were illegitimate, and all were guilty of certain abuses of power. Whether these allegorical references were a result of Caraccioli’s or perhaps Johnson’s limited knowledge of the nuances of these figures, or were inserted as a bit of intellectual humor or political commentary by captain Johnson, within the story of Misson’s ascent to captaincy, they only serve to rile up the crew with a belief in Misson’s legitimacy as a commander.

Theological/Philosophical Basis for Libertalia

Captain Johnson reveals early on in *History* that before even leaving Rome Misson was convinced by both Caraccioli and his own perception of Roman clergy to pursue the doctrine of natural law and Deism, two beliefs that would not take firm hold until a half century later, during the Enlightenment. Misson and Caraccioli held the same objections to institutionalized Christianity in Europe, noticing the lavish lives of priests and the Papal court, and the power they were able to exercise over “the minds of the weaker, which the wiser sort yielded to, in appearance only (3)” They shunned, like those emboldened during the Reformation, the interpretations of the Bible that were applied by the clergy to enforce the submission of the lower classes. Caraccioli spoke of how the only laws that should bind people are those naturally instilled, not endorsed or created by those in power, and that since nature gives man the blessing of reason, all those rules that seem contrary to reason, or claim to be *above* reason, are not to be trusted, nor are they true doctrine of God.

Captain Johnson cuts off his own explanation of Signior Caraccioli's theology, calling it "too dangerous to translate," a sentiment that is understandable, if suspiciously convenient, during an era of religious censorship of media and literature (3). Though Caraccioli and subsequently Misson cast doubts on organized religion, their spirituality is still a driving force of Libertalia's creation. The motto of Libertalia, created almost immediately after Misson became captain, was "*For God and Liberty*," chosen by Misson and his Lieutenant "as an emblem of our uprightness and resolution (Johnson, 16)." With liberty being their cause, the *Victoire's* insignia was decided to be white, in contrary to the boatswain's (Matthew le Tondu) suggestion of black, "being the most terrifying (Gosse, 213)." Caraccioli considered the implication that the *Victoire* should be in any capacity similar to a pirate ship to be offensive, and (as seems to have often been his response) worthy of an eloquent speech. He called their new republic "guardians of the peoples' rights and liberties" whereas pirates, in his words, were self-interested, pompous, and lacking principle (Johnson, 17).

A Republic on the Sea

The government and economy of Libertalia was not yet to be developed, and would be implemented once the *Victoire* docked in Madagascar, after the maritime experiences of Misson and his crew shaped the republic's ideals to a higher level of specificity than had been originally acknowledged. Libertalia was not founded on land, though its purpose and doctrine in modern day are understood to have taken hold in Madagascar. Contrarily, it began as simply a conceptual *republic* aboard the *Victoire*. After raising its white flag, embroidered with the insignia "*for God and Liberty*," the *Victoire* set sail to take part in their totally non-piratical endeavors, immediately seizing and stealing some barrels of rum and other necessities from an English sloop. Sir Thomas Butler, the captain of the ship, admitted his surprise after Misson's crew "candidly" let his ship free with little unkindness and no violence (Gosse, 214).

The next crew encountered, a Jamaican Privateer captained by Harry Ramsay, was the first to instigate a fight with *Victoire*. Misson's crew defeated Ramsay's with no deaths and few injuries, and the next day, after apologetically repossessing some small arms and ammunition, Misson let Ramsay's crew free.

Continuing on a Southerly route down the coast of Africa, Misson had many more adventurous encounters which have little enough bearing on Libertalia that they are not necessary to recount, however through these ventures Misson's crew gained the enthusiastic additions of some freed French prisoners, Hugonots, Dutch slavers, and African freedmen. After defeating the first of a few Dutch slavers, Misson gifted his crew with more of his eloquent oratory, denouncing the practice of slavery and declaring that despite differences in customs, race, or religion, men who believed they were at liberty to deny others of their liberty "differ'd from the barbarians in name only (Johnson, 28)." After his speech, Misson ordered that the enslaved Africans be freed from their chains and dressed in the fine clothing of their Dutch masters. The Africans enthusiastically joined Misson's crew, as did many of the Dutch.

The same occurred with the following Dutch slavers the *Victoire* encountered, and despite the growth of Misson's at-sea empire, he consequently noticed that Dutch customary drinking and swearing was rubbing off on his crew. Misson's subsequent response to his crew was one which Gosse described as "sincere concern" and "paternal affection (217)." He reminded them of the republic's principles of liberty and reason, and worried on their behalf that in their unsober state, he or others might be more easily able to, intentionally or not, take advantage of them. He resolved that to prevent this danger and the potential of his crew to "imitat[e] the vices of their enemies," they should be granted a "time of reflection," during which he proclaimed hope that they would among themselves make a law for the suppression of alcohol and other methods by which they would "estrangle them[selves] from the source of life," to which they all agreed (Gosse, 217).

On the final stretch of his journey to the Isles of Madagascar where he would eventually settle, Misson alongside his growing republic plundered plenty of merchant ships, though always with "regularity, tranquility, and humanity" in the eyes of those they defeated (Johnson, 31). In one of these engagements, Misson's crew defeated an English merchant at the cost of the English captain's life. Misson was distraught by this, and landed his own ship alongside the merchant ashore, where he buried the English captain with a stone engraved "Here Lies a Gallant Englishman," and a 50 gun salute (Johnson, 32). The English crew, shocked by this humility, were quick to ask entry into Misson's crew, which he accepted. Given now a second ship to command, Misson gave captaincy to his Lieutenant Caraccioli and divided his men between the two ships, which then sailed towards Johanna, an island off the Southern coast of Madagascar.

Landfall and Fortifying

Landing in Johanna, Misson and his two ships were welcomed by the Queen-regent of the Johannans on account of both the English in Misson's crew and the strength of the two ships, which she hoped they would use to aid Johanna in fighting the king of neighboring Mohila. There is much information Captain Johnson provides on Misson's time on this island, but little of this is directly relevant to Libertalia's settlement, so its description will not be nearly as detailed as that of Misson's time at sea.

On Johanna, Misson and Caraccioli both took wives, the sister of the Queen-regent and her brother's daughter, respectively. Many of the crew married as well, and 10 of their number decided to take their shares of the ships' prize and settle on the island. This number did little to diminish those still drawn to Misson's cause, as over 30 men had been gained through the ships' voyages. Misson and Caraccioli complied in some part to the Queen's wishes of enlisting their numbers and arms to fight the Mohilans, however Misson was first drawn to go against the Queen's wishes and attempt to convince the Mohilan King to establish peace with the Johannans. His civility was unreciprocated and after his second attempt at peacemaking, he and Caraccioli were ambushed and both injured, but the quick response of their crew saved them from further harm, though resulting in the death of one of their own.

Captain Johnson at this point devotes a considerable amount of space to describing the honorable response of the Johannan wife of the dead crewman, potentially as a way to provide a character explanation for the honor and bravery that both Misson's and Caraccioli's wives show, or perhaps in hopes of showing his audience in Europe the customs of Madagascar (41-42). If this narrative is, as it is seen by some, Johnson's own political commentary, then Misson's speech on slavery and equality is a plea from Captain Johnson himself, and this description is his proof that "barbarians" only differ from *civilized* Europeans by name. The widow Johnson describes wept for her dead husband and ceremonially covered him in flowers and embraced his body. When offered her rightful share of the ship's plunder, which would have belonged to her late husband, she declined, crying that no gold or material goods could bring back her husband. The crew witnessed her sadness with confusion; many had held disdain for the widow because she had expressed upon discovering his death that she was "in haste to be married again," but their apprehension was replaced by shocked respect when the woman impaled herself on a bayonet over her husband's body (Johnson, 42).

Whatever the purpose of Johnson's detail on this part of the story, the boldness of the Johannan women was not to be a singularly proven trait. When Misson and Caraccioli decided to take a short leave from Johanna, to scout the area for potential places to settle, both of their wives refused to stay behind, and it was all Misson and Caraccioli could do to prevent the wife of every married crewman from following suit. Having left on their short trip, the two captains met a Portuguese ship, which they overtook with difficulty in a battle that lasted from dawn until two in the afternoon, and resulted in a rich prize, as well as the loss of thirty men and Caraccioli's left leg.

During this battle, both wives of the captains remained on deck for the entirety, and "neither gave they the least mark of fear, except for their husbands (Johnson, 44)." With Caraccioli recovering from his injury, Misson set out on the remaining ship to find a safe asylum for the whole of their crew to settle. He found his perfect location on an island at the Northernmost point of Madagascar, which most modern sources agree was likely the Bay of Antongil, Misson choosing this natural harbor as a result of its freshwater access, rich soil and wholesome air, and level country.

Having made landfall with 27 of the remaining men in his crew (the rest being on Caraccioli's ship to defend it, with the plan to join Misson and his men once Caraccioli and the other wounded crewmen recovered), Misson proposed that they "fortify and raise a small town, and make docks for shipping, that they might have some place to call their own," but only with the "approbation of the whole company," which was enthusiastically given (Johnson, 45). After felling trees and beginning construction, Misson returned to Johanna to meet with Caraccioli, and while there asked the queen for 300 Johannan men to return with him to the new town, which the queen and her council accepted, with the condition that they would be returned after four months.

Caraccioli having recovered, he and Misson set sail for their new land on the Portuguese ship they had defeated, with the 300 Johannan men, 40 French and Englishmen, and 15

Portuguese who had elected to remain onboard. Once Misson and Caraccioli returned to their newly claimed harbor, Misson's first action was to officially christen the land *Libertalia*, and to name all the people who lived there the *Liberi*, which he hoped would become as much and more of a national identity than his men's previous affiliations as Dutch, French, English, African, etc. The newly-named *Liberi* began their fortification by building an octagonal fort around the harbor, armed with the 40 heavy cannons they had taken from the Portuguese ship, and raising houses and roads within its borders. In this process, they also encountered a nearby tribe, the *Mahometans*. Though they were only able to communicate through gestures, the *Liberi* befriended their new neighbors with gifts and kind reception.

Government and Constitution

Captain Johnson ends his account of Misson at this point, however *Libertalia* and its Great Captain, as the *Liberi* had begun to call Misson, are further archived in Johnson's account of the Rhode Island pirate Thomas Tew (who notably is certain to have existed, unlike Misson) (Johnson, 81). Tew first encountered Misson off the coast of Tanzania after Misson had won, barely, a sea battle against an armed Portuguese ship. After a few shots fired and a quickly deescalated initial hostility between Tew and Misson, Tew endeavored to visit *Libertalia*, and it is in this account that Johnson gives more detail into *Libertalia*'s government structure.

When Tew and Misson return with over a hundred Portuguese prisoners, the question of what to do with the prisoners is brought up. Misson puts forth a proposal, as is generally the initial step for any decision regarding *Libertalia*. His proposal in this case is to set the prisoners free with a ship and a generous share of goods (taken out of Misson's own share). The proposal is a dangerous one, as Tew and Caraccioli point out, as it gives the freed Portuguese the ability to return to Europe with knowledge of *Libertalia*, which would not be able to defend against a potential attack by European forces. The alternative, however, is to kill the prisoners, since they outnumbered the *Liberi* and could rebel easily. Misson calls together a council and his proposal is chosen over the alternative.

This method of decision making had carried over from when *Libertalia* was merely a conceptual republic aboard the *Victoire*, and would soon find itself with need of change, as *Libertalia* slowly transitioned into an agrarian settlement. Before these changes to *Libertalia*'s provisional constitution are made, certain events affecting the *Liberi* are important to mention, as they shine light on the methods by which *Libertalia* functioned and overcame national identity.

Tew remained in or near *Libertalia* for a considerable time, during which he often voyaged with crews of *Liberi* around the Southeast coast of Africa, to plunder resources for *Libertalia*. He freed enslaved Africans on Dutch slavers, knowing this to be the way of Misson and his republic, and would return with freedmen who joined the *Liberi* and plenty of pillaged material and goods that "were carried into the common treasury," an aspect of *Libertalia*'s monetary system—or lack thereof—that marked the pirate utopia as a society worthy of modern research and historical intrigue (Johnson, 88). Johnson, with no veiled admiration, explains

Libertalia's economic system here for the first time. "Money [was] of no use where every Thing was in common, and no hedge bounded any particular man's property (88)."

Along with the treasury of shared resources, Libertalia developed other aspects that set it apart from the rest of the world, even before the events which led to its new government. For one, Libertalia's ships were manned by half black, half white crews (Tusman, 52). The freed enslaved Africans and natives who had chosen to join the Liberi were taught to become expert seamen aboard the two ships built by the Liberi at Misson's request, named the *Liberty* and the *Childhood*. The Africans learned not only skills of sailing but developed an ability to communicate with the Liberi, partly through being taught French, but partly by employing a combination of all the tongues used within Libertalia's walls, mixing Dutch, Portuguese, English, French, and multiple African dialects into a common language that became known by the Liberi and used in conversation, a further aspect by which the Liberi eschewed their previous national ties.

Libertalia also trained its men to defend the colony, such that when a group of 50-gun Portuguese ships attacked Libertalia, with the intent "to root out a nest of Pyrates," they were shocked to see Libertalia fortified and manned by rigorously trained native soldiers as well as Tew's reinforcements of Englishmen (Johnson, 96). After the Portuguese were defeated in a bloody battle with many casualties, the Liberi found below decks two of the freed Portuguese prisoners to which they had generously given leave, a ship, and resources, and who had sworn an oath not to reveal the location or existence of the pirate settlement.

The council of Liberi, with Tew's influence, raucously agreed that the two Portuguese prisoners should be hanged, a decision that Misson and Caraccioli hesitantly justified in response to the nearly unanimous demand of execution by the public. Misson, reluctant to establish any exception to his principle that "none had power over the life of another, but God alone, who gave it," struggled to assent to the majority, but at their demand acquiesced that there should occasionally be an exception only by necessity of self-preservation and in defense of liberty (Johnson also points out in this section that in the Lisbon Gazette's account of this event, they mistook Misson for Henry Every, thus preventing a potential proof and public knowledge of Misson) (96-99).

This was the beginning of a rising tension between Tew and Misson, which Tew proposed they solve at swordpoint, however Caraccioli countered that the resulting loss of men would weaken the colony whoever was victorious, and instead suggested an "amicable agreement" be established by a general assembly meeting to create laws and government (99). The resulting system (proposed by Caraccioli) was anachronistically modern, but well received by the assembly. The Liberi would be divided into companies of ten men, each with one elected representative and an equal share of land and resources, which would be divided evenly within the company. The representatives would meet in an assembly house, which was built subsequently, and would be overseen by what Caraccioli called a "Lord Conservator," who would be given supreme power to enforce rewards and punishments, and would be elected every 3 years. The first, as decided by this body of politicians in complete consensus, would be Captain

Misson. Misson was given as Lord Conservator the sovereignty to create officers, which he did, naming Tew Admiral and Caraccioli Secretary of State. Interestingly, despite being a democratic position, the assembly gave Lord Conservator “all the ensigns of royalty to attend him” and the address of “Supream Excellence,” both of which serve as reminders that despite Libertalia’s democratic tendencies, it undoubtedly has contextual validation of its own late-17th century frame of reference.

At the culmination of a governmental body, the mixed language that had been developed by the Liberi natives became official, and it was agreed upon that Tew would begin the construction of a Libertalia arsenal for future defense. The first assembly of representatives lasted ten days and Johnson claims that the laws created during this period were numerous and were printed and dispersed through Libertalia.

Conflict and Descent

As with plenty of narratives, if this moment of joy and inspiration in Libertalia’s development can be seen as the climax of this story, it is then no surprise that the resolution of this account, and in the case of Libertalia it is not a happy one, happens rather quickly. Thomas Tew and most of his original crew decide, with the blessing of Libertalia’s political body, to set sail for more plunder to bring back to Libertalia. After they set out, they happen upon a small settlement, detailed more in Thomas Tew’s story than Libertalia’s, but made up of the Quartermaster and some crewmates who had, previous to encountering Misson, mutinied and deserted Tew.

The Quartermaster, who had become governor of the small settlement “received him civilly” and Tew came ashore alone to recount his discovery of Libertalia, and offer the men to return with him, which they declined (Johnson, 102-103). While ashore, a storm struck, and Tew was unable to return to his ship due to the tides, forced to watch from the beach as his ship was wrecked by the waves and sunk, drowning all men aboard. With no way to return to Misson or send word to him, Tew remained with the colony of his deserters for three months, until the *Childhood* and the *Liberty* chanced upon them, and Captain Mission came ashore to embrace Tew, before revealing the fate of Libertalia.

He recounted that after Tew had left, the Liberi had been attacked on two fronts by an army of natives, unprovoked, at midnight. The natives, finding little opposition, slaughtered the Liberi, “without distinction of age or sex (Johnson, 107).” Caraccioli was killed, and Misson was barely able to escape with the remaining Liberi and a decent amount of gold and diamond. From there, an overwrought Misson and Tew boarded once more their two sloops, Misson headed to France with some of his men, and the remainder electing to travel with Tew to America. Misson’s ship sank in a storm, once again in view of Tew, who could not assist.

Fact Versus Fiction: Deciphering the Truth Behind Libertalia

After Tew’s ship made landfall in America, he and Misson’s old crew parted ways. One of Misson’s men returned to Rochelle in France, where his papers allegedly came into Captain

Charles Johnson's possession through a "friend and correspondent" once the man died (Johnson, 108). The manuscript Johnson claims detailed Misson's life was never recovered, nor any other documentation of Libertalia, leading modern historians to regretfully assume that the colony was a fiction.

The inclusion of this undocumented story after Johnson's first volume was praised for its accurate accounts of piratical history is puzzling, certainly, and yet the evidence discovered supporting both sides of this question only makes it more uncertain. One of the sources Johnson uses in his second volume is a memoir published by Robert Drury, an English sailor who was wrecked on the coast of Madagascar and survived for 15 years before his rescue: a familiar storyline, and dispersed under the same publisher as *Robinson Crusoe*, written by Daniel Defoe, who potentially was also the identity of Captain Johnson (Furbank & Owens, 109). Drury's memoir has also lost credibility by virtue of plagiarizing certain paraphrased portions of the 1658 book, *History of Madagascar*.

To further obfuscate the facts of this mystery, the more prevalent modern identification of Captain Johnson as a pen name for sailor Nathaniel Mist does not give clarity to this account, and historian Bialuschawski claims that though he believes Mist to be the real author of *A General History of the Pyrates*, he "received the tale [of Libertalia] from another, possibly a french writer (36)." After visiting Madagascar in 1712, Governor Woodes Rogers, who had become famous for ending the careers of many of the most famous pirates, recalled of his encounters "those miserable wretches, who had made such a noise in the world," had become "poor and despicable, even to the natives (Rennie, 107)."

Ironically, though Rogers intends to contradict the belief that pirates had created successful anarchist colonies in Madagascar, his description of the remaining pirates does align with what would have been the destroyed remains of Libertalia. The remaining pirates, notes Rogers, possessed "but one ship, and a sloop that lay sunk (Rennie, 108)." Kevin Rushby, a journalist who set out to find the lost pirate utopias of Africa, came across evidence of houses and cemeteries seemingly belonging to the pirates, as well as an iron cauldron used to make a particular pirate dish, *salmagundi* (Kulkarni 1.1). His travels mostly took place on the East coast of mainland Africa, with the cauldron found in Northwestern Madagascar being the closest he traveled to where Libertalia was thought to be, and though given the potential to get closer, "he doesn't even try to hack his way through the dripping forest to the promised pile of algae-covered stones of the fort," and so Libertalia remains neither proven nor disproven (Foden).

Each source and historical account that attempts to provide insight on Libertalia's legitimacy postulates that there are definitely aspects of truth to the conceptual identity of Libertalia. Pirates were as a whole anti-authority and often turned to piracy as a result of disenfranchisement associated with capitalism and economic or social inequality, which would understandably result in their appreciation for the democratic decision making that was often undertaken on ships, and a lack of respect for private property or ownership of goods after experiencing the freedom of the ocean and the share-system of distributing booty. It is also true that there were some pirate colonies on and around Madagascar, though they were generally

short term and violent, an example being John Plantain's stint as "King" of Ranter Bay, where he married a few native women and had frequent bloody clashes with the native king (whose daughter was one of Plantain's wives) (Rennie, 245). Henry Every, in opposition, spent some time on Madagascar and established a little-documented colony of his own, perhaps leading captain Johnson to make the claim that the Lisbon Gazette attributed to Every a story that was actually of Misson (Frohock).

Even in regards to what is written of Libertalia, historians disagree on exactly what the real or imaginary colony's system of government should be called. Gosse refers to the colony as having been "run on strictly socialistic lines (218)." Historian Manuel Schonhorn calls Libertalia a "floating commonwealth" at sea, and once settled, a "communist utopia (xxxviii)," although historians Hill and Novak deny that Libertalia was communist, despite being "undoubtedly democratic (118)." Marcus Rediker emphasizes Libertalia's anti-capitalism in an era of dispossession associated with wage labor, and judges that Misson and many others like him "saw piracy as a war of self-preservation (51)."

Thoughts and Conclusion

Were a man such as Misson to have existed, with the same characteristics of honor, principle, and mercy, and were he to then attain a companion who supplemented his honor and principle with theory and doctrine, and be persuasive enough to sway men to their joint cause, despite his companion's mercy making the enforcement of his principles difficult, for those men to form an at-sea republic, and then a self-governed settlement would not be a far reach to imagine. If captain Misson is to be dismissed as a fictional character, it is not by virtue of his having such democratic and liberal ideas as a pirate, but by the unlikeliness of a man existing with the traits to lead a colony like Libertalia, and having the companionship of a lieutenant whose qualities shone where his captain's failed, and both of them having come into circumstances that gave them command of a ship and men and an understanding of the life of piracy.

If Misson and Caraccioli did not exist, then Captain Johnson's account of the specific methods and government they established to build a modern anarchist-democratic colony would have the effect of bringing forward men with the required traits, knowing as a result of reading his *History* the ideal locations, plans, requirements, and guidelines for building their own *Libertalia*, wherein lies, perhaps, the author's intent. Many historians see the story of Misson as Johnson's own reformatory political ideas, and in sharing them as a biographical account of a successful endeavor to employ these ideas and principles, Johnson gave to all his audience, being perhaps younger, more opportunistic or adventurous as he, a step by step guide by which anyone with the courage to try could potentially give life to the utopia that Johnson himself could only imagine.

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