

الكراهية الإسلامية في مسرحية أوثيلو للكاتب شكسبير

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الملخص

تعرض هذه الدراسة فكرة الكراهية الإسلامية كمفهوم متخلف نظرياً في الأدب الإنجليزي أوائل عصر النهضة، حيث أنها تهتم - تحديداً - بجذور الخوف من الإسلام في مسرحية أوثيلو للكاتب ويليام شكسبير، وتستمد رؤاها من نظريات العرق ما بعد الاستعمار - الاستشراق - لإثبات ما إن كان أوثيلو يتوافق مع موضوع النقاش قدر تعلق الأمر بالكراهية الإسلامية.

لقد وصف النقاد الغربيون زواج أوثيلو من دزدومونا بالزواج غير المتكافئ، مستندين بنقدهم على أوربية وبياض العروس وعروبة الحفيد أوثيلو، ونظراً لسواد بشرته وشرقية عرقه، كان أوثيلو كثيراً ما يواجه العداء، وتصادم الأعراق، ومعارضة المعتقدات ببيئة تملؤها الغيرة، فهو ككيان آخر يصبح ضحية لمؤامرة رجل أبيض، فضلاً عن كونه شخصية عربية ليست في العالم العربي بل في العالم الغربي.

تستهل الدراسة الحالية مقدماتها ببعض المعلومات عن خلفية الكراهية الإسلامية - كمفهوم حديث متخلف - بما فيها تعريفات، وأسباب، واقتباسات لشخصيات أوربية بارزة مناهضة للإسلام، وأخيراً تتبنى الدراسة الحالية النظرية الأدبية لمفهوم الاستشراق ما بعد الاستعمار وذلك لإثبات فكرة الخوف من الإسلام في مسرحية أوثيلو.

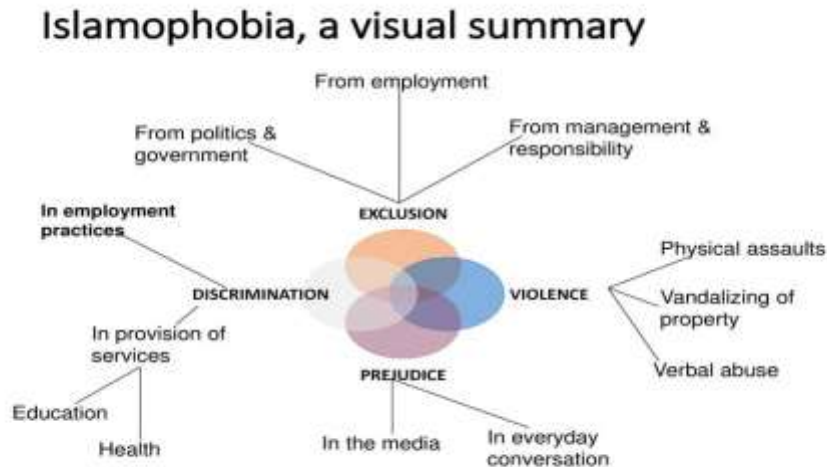
الكلمات المفتاحية: الكراهية الإسلامية، شكسبير، أوثيلو، الاستشراق، أخرى

١. Introduction

The meaning of the term “Islamophobia” is still controversial and debatable today. There are also a number of possible terms used interchangeably expressing feelings of hatred towards Muslims, such as anti-Muslim prejudice, anti-Muslimism, hatred of Muslims, intolerance against Muslims, Muslimophobia¹, anti-mosque, and anti-Muhammadan². According to Allan (٢٠١٠), it was Alphonse Étienne Dinet and Sliman ben Ibrahim who first used the term in their ١٩١٤ biography of Islam's prophet Muhammad, as a word in French “islamophobie”. In the English version of the work, Richardson (٢٠٠٩, as cited in Allan, ٢٠١٠) writes that the word was not translated as “Islamophobia”, rather as “feelings inimical to Islam.” Moreover, the word did not mean fear/loathing of Muslims by non-Muslims but rather it meant phobia of Islam by those who were feminists and liberal Muslims.

Islamophobia has become a very important universal topic in this century. It has intensified since Ayatollah Khomeini's (١٩٨٩) legal pronouncement stirring up Muslims to attempt to assassinate Salman Rushdie, the author of *The Satanic Verses*, and since the ٩/١١ attacks in ٢٠٠١ (Benn; Jawad ٢٠٠٣). Vertovec (٢٠١١) states that the continuing growth in Islamophobia might be psychological due to the increased Muslim presence and Muslim success in the European society. Vertovec concludes "As the public sphere shifts to provide a more prominent place for Muslims, Islamophobic tendencies may amplify" (Vertovec ٢٠١١). According to Sajid (٢٠٠٥), "Islamophobia" has existed in every corner of Western society throughout history. He continues to add that aggression towards Islam and Muslims has been a phenomenon in European societies since the eighth century of the Common Era. It has taken different faces, however, at different times and has accomplished a variety of functions. For example, the violence in Spain in the fifteenth century was not the same as the aggression that had been expressed and undertaken in the Crusades. Other forms of Islamophobia were apparent during the days of the Ottoman Empire. "The term was first used about Islam in the *Middle East Journal* in ١٩٥٧, but it was not until ١٩٨١ that its application to Islam gained currency" (Sajid ٢٠٠٥). Kofi Annan in his conference "Confronting Islamophobia" said that the term Islamophobia had to be invented in order to "take account of increasingly widespread bigotry" (Annan, ٢٠٠٤). In his writing, *New Humanist*, Benn (٢٠٠٧) proposes that people who have phobia of the rise of Islamophobia nurture an environment which is neither intellectually nor morally healthy. He coins the term "Islam-phobia". He continues to argue that this hatred will lead into ignorance of Islam's true nature (Benn, ٢٠٠٧). The following chart, from *Islamophobia: A Challenge for us all* by The Runnymede Trust, shows different hostility against Muslims^١:

^١ The diagram picture is taken from Report by The Runnymede Trust. "Islamophobia: A Challenge for us All". Retrieved from <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/islamophobia.pdf>



Embury-Dennis (٢٠١٨), The Independent Newspaper reporter, writes “Nationally, there were ٨٠,٣٩٣ hate crimes in ٢٠١٦-١٧, compared with ٦٢,٥١٨ in ٢٠١٥-١٦ - the largest increase since the Home Office began recording figures seven years ago”.

٢. Literature Review

The world kneels out of indebtedness to the central work of the Western canon represented by William Shakespeare. The following previous studies highlight Shakespeare's contribution to this day. He not only invented the English language but also created, as Bloom argues, the human nature, as we know it today. Before Shakespeare, there was characterization. After Shakespeare, there were characters, men and women capable of changing the world. His greatness is present in every field of knowledge including translations, literary criticism, productions and adaptations, and even in clinical studies.

٢.١ Critical Approaches

Vaughan (٢٠١٦) discusses that there have been numerous interpretations of Othello over the last ٤٠٠ years and the four most recent critical approaches are feminist, New historicism, Marxism and Post-colonialism. Othello brings about serious issues of gender role, racial themes, economic problems, and colonial aspects of the early modern England. While Al-Dabbagh (٢٠١٠) in his book *Shakespeare, the Orient, and the Critic* argues that no past criticism had discussed the theme of Orientalism adequately enough in the content of Shakespeare's Othello. He points out that characters such as Cleopatra, Othello, and Shylock are mostly studied from their oriental characteristics only. Then he concludes with the idea that Renaissance humanism over crossed issues like race, class, and culture. Ghazoul (١٩٩٨)

in her article “The Arabization of Othello” talks about the effect of Othello and his background on the European imagination and, in a reversed way, its impact on Arabs/Africans. This exchange in both directions is necessarily modified by the perception of the Other and modes of literary production of the time. Several studies show the public is illiterate when it comes to understanding the connotations of Orientalism as Thompson A. (٢٠١٠) gives a very interesting conclusion, in his study about how amateur Shakespearean performances (Asian-American students) misconceptualise the idea of Moor from oriental point of view. Othello, in the clips and videos done by these student performers, is unmoored “is unmoored historically, linguistically, and narratively” by updating the language, setting and even the plot.

٢,٢ Productions and Adaptations

Recent productions and adaptations prove that Othello is still the center of interest in today's theatre. The Middle East Institute (٢٠١٦) writes about how the recent production, by Shakespeare Theatre Company, play of Shakespeare's *Othello* has brought up and highlighted the problem of the century “fiery discourse on Islam, Muslim refugees, Donald Trump and ISIS”. The reproduced play is strikingly similar to the original play as far as both content and context are concerned. The new play is produced in England. Its Othello, acted by an American-Pakistani Muslim actor, comes to realize that his marriage from a Venetian woman has brought him against the society. The director Ron Daniels explains his choice of a lead character with personality similar to Othello to put the audience out of their comfort zone and let them face their stereotypical standards. In conclusion, the study is more like a solid and modern experiment that has a cathartic effect and to prove that people still go after the stereotypical ideas when judging people based on their appearances and characters stated while interviewing. Another study by Newstok (٢٠٠٥) highlights how Iago, Othello, Emilia and even Desdemona work on dramaturgical strategies to involve the audience's expectations into anxiety, contradictions and alienation. Balogun (٢٠١٠) writes an essay about Ahmed Yerima's adaptation of Othello, entitled *Otaelo* (٢٠٠٢). He argues that contemporary, as well as ongoing, productions of Othello address prominent socio-cultural and political issues of various societies. However, his study suggests collaboration with Shakespeare rather than questioning the colonial political and cultural power. In his analysis of the production, he “dramatizes the debilitating and tragic effects of the Osu practice among the Igbo people of southeast Nigeria.”

In conclusion, the previous studies above showed that the century has concentrated on different problems with no adequate sources that deal with the controversial topic of Islamophobia while approaching *Othello*. Thus, in writing about *Othello*, literary writers and scholars are more interested in, as Vaughan (٢٠١٦) claims, feminist, new historicist, marxist and post-colonial theories. This study will adopt the postcolonial literary theory of Orientalism to prove the Islamophobic ideology found in *Othello*.

٢. Research Questions

The main objective of the study is to identify the theme of Islamophobia found in Shakespeare's *Othello*.

To reach the research objective, the current study asks the following questions:

١. Did Shakespeare know about Islam?
٢. Is there an Islamophobic theme in the play?

٤. Methodology

٤,١ Research Design

The current study adopted a qualitative approach in exploring the phenomenon of Islamophobia in *Othello*. The aim of research design is to fulfil greater control of the study and to develop the validity of the study by examining the research problem.

٤,٢ Sampling

The sampling strategy used in this study is the purposeful sampling because it deals with a play in order to obtain rich information about the hot topic of Islamophobia found in *Othello*.

٥. Discussion

٥,١ Did Shakespeare know about Islam and Muslims?

Shakespeare sixteenth-century English poet knew about Islam and had some connections with Muslims. Conquered by Sultan Mehmed II, the fall of Constantinople into Ottomans in ١٤٥٣, the invention of printing, the Reformation, and geographical discoveries and some other factors, led to the artistic and cultural movement called Renaissance in Italy first then reaching England during Queen Elizabeth I (١٥٥٨-١٦٠٣) (Lewis, ١٩٤٤). The

Crusades, which were series of militant missions to invade the Holy Land, were the first reason ignited the entrance of the Islamic stories into England (Lewis ١٩٤٤). Professor John Makdisi's article "The Islamic Origins of the Common Law", stated that it was the Islamic Law of the Middle Ages that inspired the English (Makdisi as cited in Devichand, ٢٠٠٨). In ١٥٧٨, diplomatic relations between the Ottoman Empire represented by Sultan Murad III and England represented by Elizabeth I. The two countries started friendly relationships and helped commerce, science, literature, philosophy, and culture flourish (Stearns, ٢٠٠١).

Morocco also had its share in her alliance with England. The alliance between the two states developed during the ١٦th century (Abun-Nasr, ١٩٨٧). As far as literature is concerned, the Muslim Moors had a noticeable influence on the works of William Shakespeare and other writers, such as George Peele. Some of their works featured Moorish characters, such as Peele's *The Battle of Alcazar* and Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, *Titus Andronicus* and *Othello*, which featured a Moorish Othello as its title character. Vaughan said that Othello was based on the Moorish ambassador, Abd el-Ouahed ben Messaoud ben Mohammed Anoun, who had come to promote an Anglo-Moroccan alliance during the reign of Elizabeth I circa ١٦٠٠ (Vaughan, ٢٠٠٥). Protestant England, in the beginning of the ١٧th century, had significant diplomatic relations with Safavids of Iran, Muslims of Morocco, and the Ottomans. As trade paths founded, dramatic ideas about Muslims permeated the society (Garner; Selod ٢٠١٥). According to *The Economist Magazine*, "between ١٥٧٦ and ١٦٠٣ more than ٦٠ plays featuring Muslims in the guise of Turks, Moors or Persians featured on London's stages." (Prospero, ٢٠١٦)

Believe it or not, different sources have written about William Shakespeare's direct and indirect affiliation with the Islamic world as Wes Jamroz, in his book *Shakespeare's Sequel to Rumi's Teaching*, astonishingly indicates "Shakespeare was strongly influenced by Rumi's poetry," In addition to that, just like Rumi's aim was to prepare the East to the next phase, Shakespeare prepared the Western society for the next phase of the evolutionary process as well (Jamroz, ٢٠١٥). Taylor pointed out that:

Islam was an important part of Shakespeare's world, and English superstitions about Islam shaped some of his work. Shakespeare apparently read Richard Knolles's General History of the Turks (١٦٠٣), which means that he knew more about Islamic history and culture than most of us. He refer[ed] to Islam – to the prophet "Mahomet" to Morocco, and Barbary and Constantinople, to Moors, Turks, Ottomites, sultans, Saracens,

paynims, moriscos-at least ١٤١ Times in different plays (Taylor, ٢٠٠٤)

Furthermore, we find Shakespeare, in his dramas, made clear indications to the Arab countries like Palestine, Arabia, Egypt and Morocco. He referred to people of Arabic ethnicity like the Prince of Morocco and Queen Cleopatra of Egypt.

“I know a lady in Venice would have walked barefoot
to Palestine for a touch of his nether lip.”

(*Othello* IV, iii, ٣٦-٣٧)

“ ‘All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand’ “

(*Macbeth* V, i, ٤٨-٤٩).

Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
I' th' posture of a whore.”

(*Antony and Cleopatra* V, ii, ٢١٣-٢٠)

Despite Shakespeare's favorable knowledge of the Arab landscape as wild and Egypt as rich with its charming music (flute), amazing perfume, gum trees, magic spells and so on, yet he weakens the Egyptian military for Romans.

Historically, the immergence of translating from Koran started in ١٦٤٩ after which Shakespeare made an explicit reference to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in *Henry VI*. Shakespeare compares the falsehood of Prophet Muhammad's prophecy with the brilliant Joan of Arc (The Maid of Orleans) to please the Protestant audience;

Was Mahomet inspired with a dove?
Thou with an eagle art inspired then...
How may I reverently worship thee enough?

Shakespeare continues giving his Arab character bad and negative features. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare attributes the Prince of Morocco as having inferiority complex as a result of his black skin; and judging things based upon appearance.

To sum up this section, it is apparent that Shakespeare knew about Arab Muslims (Middle East) and Islam. He used negative connotations and denotations when referring to Islam. The next section will discuss the postcolonial theory of Orientalism in *Othello*.

٥,٢ Orientalism in *Othello*

This study sheds light on the concept of “other” in *Othello* by using Edward Said’s postcolonial theory: Orientalism. Although postcolonial theories are modern and Shakespeare’s *Othello* goes centuries back, we can say that it is such literary works that gave birth to these modern critical theories.

Orientalism is ground based by Edward Said who defined it as:

Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident.” Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, “mind,” destiny, and so on . (Said ٢٠٠٣)

Said continues in his book to indicate that the idea of The Orient was a European creation in the first place. “The Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience” (Said ٢٠٠٣).

Chew (١٩٣٧) states that the “othering” of Islam had created what he called a binary that in turn led to enmity between Islam and Christianity. It is obvious from Said and Chew’s statements that “other” is always viewed from the perspective of the viewer and not vice versa.

The fall of Constantinople (Istanbul today) in ١٤٥٣, into Ottomans, led by Sultan Mehmed II resulted in long enmity and conflict between Islam (represented by the Orient: Middle East and Asia) and Christianity (represented by Europe: England). Although the Turk was Renaissance Europe’s major eastern concern, the “darker” people __Indians and Moors __ were rejected and labeled together as “others” (Birnbaum, ٢٠٠٦). This long lasting enmity is present in Shakespeare’s *Othello* where we have a war between the Turks and Venetians. In addition, the adventures and voyages the European travellers have done to the Orient gave ground base beliefs and stories of the Oriental world and its vast desert. From Said’s point of view, the bigotry of the West had created stereotypical fancies about the East. Thus, this led to crucial dissimilarity between the “rational West” and the

“irrational East” and paved the way to the production of European identity superior to the Eastern cultures. This West-East binary used as an excuse for European colonialism and the unrelenting control of the United States over the Islamic and Arabic world in the post war period.

In the current study the concept of “other” is manifested in Shakespeare’s character Othello. *Othello* lends itself to the postcolonial discourse since it deals with race, outsider, and colonization between the colonizing West and the “other”.

To see if *Othello* fits into the discourse of Orientalism, first we need to shed light on and discuss the elements that make Othello, the character, oriental (Easterner/other). His nationality, skin color, marriage, religion makes Othello irrational and an outsider (other).

Othello is figured as the Moor, barber, irrational, and the outsider who falls in love (passionately but not wisely) with Desdemona and wants to fit into the Venetian society for her sake. Desdemona in turn loves Othello for his braveness and honorable soul. However, this miscegenation is doomed and the two die eventually. Othello, the man, is despised and condemned by the Venetians just because of his union with a white Venetian lady “white ewe”. Thus to fit into the “other”, Shakespeare chose a Moorish character for Othello who becomes subsequently controversial. Abdulhameed (٢٠١١) confirms that some works take Othello’s character as a Moroccan person. While others mention that he is a Muslim who converted to Christianity.

Smith (٢٠٠٩) quotes the term “Moor” from the OED :

Originally: a native or inhabitant of ancient Mauretania, a region of North Africa corresponding to parts of present-day Morocco and Algeria. Later usually: a member of a Muslim people of mixed Berber and Arab descent inhabiting north-western Africa (now mainly present-day Mauritania), who in the ٨th cent. conquered Spain. In the Middle Ages, and as late as the ١٧th century, the Moors were widely supposed to be mostly black or very dark-skinned, although the existence of ‘white Moors’ was recognized. Thus the term was often used, even into the ٢٠th cent., with the sense ‘black person’

(Smith ٢٠٠٩)

Loomba (٢٠٠٢) points out “Moor could mean both ‘Muslim’ and ‘black’ “. In Cesare Frederici’s *Voyage and Travel* “moor” was used to refer to a Muslim: he claims that ‘wheras I speak of Moores I mean Mahomets sect.” (Frederici ١٥٨٨). Thus, being black and Muslim were stereotyped as evil (Bartels, ١٩٩٠). Moreover, Othello’s racial identity was made clear when the Duke declares Brabantio that his “son in-law is far more fair than black” (I.ii.٢٨٦), Iago calls him black the second when he raises a glass to the “black Othello” (II.iii.٢٧), Brabantio’s disgrace that his daughter would cleave to a “sooty bosom” (I.ii.٧٠), and Emeila’s attribute to Othello as a “blacker devil” (V.ii.١٣٢). Othello also makes reference to his own skin “for I am black”(III.iii.٢٦٥). Based on this textual evidence, it is clear that Othello is of black complexion. Abdulhameed (٢٠١١) mentions four reasons, I agree with only three, of Othello’s nationality as an Arab; the first is he is from Morocco or Mauritania, secondly, the original source of Othello has been taken from Thousand Nights and a Night, and the third is the handkerchief he gave to Desdemona was given to his mother by an Egyptian woman (Abdulhameed ٢٠١١). Although Othello’s conversion to Christianity is ambiguous in the play, many critics use Leo Africanus’s *A Geographical Historie of Africa* as an intertext for *Othello*. Africanus and Othello are two Moors who have been Christianized to fit in the European society. (Bartels, ١٩٩٠). In act ٢ scene ٣, Iago reveals Othello’s religion, “And then for her To win the Moor, were’t to renounce his baptism, All seals and symbols of redeemed sin...”(٢,٣,٣٤٢-٤٤).

Iago represents the occident, Othello’s counterpart. He is cunning, mind-control, next-to-devil, conceited, envious and, for most, racist. Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s famous description of Iago as “motiveless malignity” that is to say Iago did not have any reasonable motivation for his actions because he is the devil himself. He hates Othello and despises him for his black complexion, when he says, “I hate the Moor” and elsewhere he adds, “ I do hate him as I do hell pains.” Iago envies Othello for his respected position in the army of the host country. He believes that Othello is strange (orient) and does not deserve such position and important value.

Shakespeare does not put heavy weight of importance on whether Othello is from Red Sea, desert, Arabian Gulf or a Mediterranean shore rather he generalizes using attributes, like Moor and black to connote an Arab and Muslim stranger in a Western host country (Venice). Thus, the fundamental theme of Orientalism, I may say, does apply on the social and ethnic distinctions in *Othello*.

You may argue to say that it is universally known that mankind is apt to evil and its destructive power, as Irving Ribner (as cited in Lawlor ١٩٦٢) argues that Othello is an “emotional equivalent of universal human experience.” But then I can argue to say that it would be fair if Shakespeare used a protagonist from Venetian members and of white complexion who has prestigious rank in military and whose wife is “white ewe” and as white as snow; and still have that same universal human experience theme in the play. By doing so, Shakespeare would avoid creating defiance and racism. Michael Neill, states that rather than opposing racism, the play explicitly creates it by “engag[ing] its audience in a conspiracy to lay naked the scene of forbidden [miscegenist] desire, only penalty for such exposure is death and oblivion.” (as cited in Bartels, ١٩٩٠). In addition, from occidental point of view, Shakespeare draws the personality of Othello on a stereotypical Eastern male. He is naïve, easily driven, lustful, honour-seeker, and jealous about his woman. What is more, Shakespeare over amplifies Othello’s naivety. He is such a short-sighted man that he cannot figure out a scheme being planned to set him up. Moreover, Iago touches chord of Eastern man’s serious stand on a woman’s honour and chastity. So he knew that arousing such serious matter would make Othello intolerable and overly jealous. After having information about his wife’s direct contact with Cassio, Othello grows overly jealous and never tastes peace of mind. Even more, this feeling reaches its climax when Iago brings him the handkerchief as an evidence of Desdemona’s dishonesty, Othello, in turn, just like any other Oriental husband promised for revenge. “Till that a capable and wide revenge swallow them up” (*Othello*, III, i). Othello would not be satisfied with mere words, as he is a man of action. Just like his Eastern counterparts, Othello proudly puts his revenge plot into action and goes to his woman’s chamber full of bad intention- that is taking his lady’s life. Therefore and indeed, *Othello*’s occidental impersonation of the stereotypical Eastern male encourages interpretations that reflect what Orientalism is all about.

٦. Conclusion

To sum up, Othello represents the modern Arab Muslim who has migrated to Europe whether escaping from many faces of persecution or simply to find a better life. He is having psychological problems adjusting himself in the new society. He is torn apart between his Oriental nature and the obligations of the occidental country. Just like Othello, he has left his religion, married a white European woman, and joined the European military just to fit in

and be part of that society and yet he is looked at and considered as an outsider. What is more, just like Othello, he is manipulated and victimized and deemed death and oblivion. Though the term “Islamophobia” is of twentieth-century trend, Shakespeare’s *Othello* functions as a solid document on early ideas and practices of Islamophobia. In other words, it is such early literary works gave birth to such modern term_ Islamophobia. Islamophobic connotations are strongly present, whether intentionally or unintentionally, in the play as seen through the lens of Orientalism. Othello is the “other” in terms of he is an outsider, Arab, black and Moor in the eyes of the West (occident).

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Islamophobia in Shakespeare's *Othello*

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Abstract

This study explores the theoretically underdeveloped concept of Islamophobia found in early Renaissance English literature. More specifically, it is more concerned with roots of Islamophobia in William Shakespeare's *Othello*. It draws its insights on postcolonial race theory, Orientalism, to prove *Othello* does commune with the controversial theme of Islamophobia.

Western critics described the union between the Moor and Desdemona as unsuccessful marriage as the bride is fair skinned and European and Othello is a barbarian Arab. Because of his black skin and oriental ethnic, Othello faces enmity, clash of races, and opposition of beliefs spiced with atmosphere of jealousy. As an "other" being, he becomes a scapegoat of a white man's plot. Moreover, he is an Arab character not in the Arab world but in the Western world.

The main objective of the study is to identify the theme of Islamophobia found in Shakespeare's *Othello*. To reach the research objective, the current study asks two

questions. First, did Shakespeare know about Islam? Second, is there an Islamophobic theme in the play?

The introduction section will give some background information about Islamophobia (since it is a modern underdeveloped concept) including definitions, causes and some Islamophobic quotes of prominent Western figures. Then, it will investigate Shakespeare's relation with Islam and Muslims. Finally, this study will adopt the postcolonial literary theory_Orientalism_ to prove the Islamophobic ideology found in *Othello*.

Keywords: Islamophobia, Shakespeare, Othello, Orientalism, Other