"Santiago Matamoros" or Saint James the Moor Killer: Who Wants to Kill the Moor in William Shakespeare's *Othello*?

Zied Ben Amor

Faculty of Arts and Humanities of Sousse, Sousse University

Abstract

The question of race is a dynamic site where anxiety and colonialism manifest themselves in Shakespeare's Othello. The first part of the research interrogates Othello as a complex construct shaped by the time's cultural fashion about race. The study of race from the paradigms of imagery and postcolonialism reveals that the building of Othello is backed by a well-constructed set of ideas unveiling a colonialist hegemonic discourse. The second part of the analysis challenges to go beyond a mere critical reception of the play according to postcolonialism by introducing a double-fold reflection: First, it is an invitation to recall the importance of aesthetic dimensions in reading texts from multicultural or political sides. The "transmigratory nature of the dramatic text" calls on injecting aesthetic alternatives while dealing with confrontations between cultures; it addresses the question of what happens when Othello is re-appropriated by North African stage directors. The focus on the Tunisian directors Tawfik Al Jibali's and Muhammad Driss' adaptations of Othello has allowed us to consider transmigrating theatre as an alternative to ideology and race in reading Othello. Second, it is a claim to review the reception of postcolonialism so that it would not service violence and terrorism but instead usher in post-postcolonialism and prepare the ground for what Jyotsna Singh has called "the Global Renaissance" and the "Global Shakespeare Movement".

Keywords: Othello, postcolonialism, transmigratory nature of dramatic texts, Mohamed Driss and Tawfiq Al Jibali, Global Renaissance

1.   Introduction

The meaning of "Orientalism" has been given a new twist through the writings of Edward Said. He believes that the Orient, the Middle East, and the Arab cultures and societies are subjects of a systematic strategic tradition of representation in Western society's academic and artistic spheres. This representation, always according to Said, is hostile and deprecatory; it is shaped by the attitudes of the era of European imperialism in the 18th and 19th centuries. Postcolonialism defines itself as an attempt to practise "writing back", "counter-discourse", and "oppositional literature" and to spell out "con-text" in a kind of combative relationship with the Western literary canon. William Shakespeare's play *Othello* (1603/2016) is representative of the issues of racial and gender identities in English Renaissance drama. Exploring these matters without taking the post-colonial perspective would be rather simplistic.

The opening part of my analysis will interrogate *Othello* as a complex construct shaped by the time's cultural fashion and assumptions about politics and society. It will attempt to demonstrate that the play's dramatic action and building of the characters are backed by a well-constructed set of ideas that unveil a colonialist hegemonic Western spirit in its interaction with the "Oriental" character Othello. The essay will reach a culminating point by pointing up possible limits of the postcolonialist reading of *Othello from* a double perspective. The first one will emphasise the importance of the aesthetic scope in reading the play. The "transmigratory nature of the dramatic" injects aesthetic alternatives when dealing with so-called clashes between cultures. As for the second perspective, it reads postcolonialism while keeping an emotionally detached distance from it with reliance on critical readings of postcolonialism, on the one hand, and suggesting the alternative of the "Global Renaissance" in reading *Othello* and Shakespeare, on the other.

The search for emotional detachment has become an urgent necessity for me as a North African scholar belonging to an ex-colonised country and living in a period where the danger of violence and terrorism is real because discourses of hatred and self-victimisation accentuate problems of stigmatisation of others. The observation triggers off this belief that a simplistic reading of postcolonialism could contribute to falling quickly into the trap of superficial victimisation and cast all the blame on the Other without indulging either in the process of self-assessment, self-criticism or considering the relations between countries and civilisations, whether from a political side or an aesthetic one objectively.

2. Othello and postcolonialism: "Santiago matamoros"

The matter of race and ethnicity is a strategy set up to represent the colonial discourse on otherness. The race is a dynamic site where racial anxiety and colonialism manifest themselves in *Othello*. Regardless of his military prowess and noble origins, the Moor's ethnic background is emphatically marginalised by the Venetian nobility. Othello's mixed marriage and desire to create his proper offspring escalate his fear of his dark colour. This miscegenation with a sexual connotation is ominous because it threatens Venetian racial purity. Imtiaz Habib argues, "Sexuality is central to the idea of race understood as lineage, or bloodline because the idea of racial purity depends upon a strict control of lineage" (2000, p. 32). In the play, miscegenation is a distinguishing trait. Norman Sanders, in the introduction to his Cambridge edition of *Othello* (2003), affirms that "it is mainly when the race is connected with miscegenation that it becomes a highly-charged emotional issue for the internationally-minded Venetians; and it was probably more so for the insular theatregoers of Jacobean England" (2003, p.11). Iago hints at Brabantio's future and describes his descendants as animal-like creatures

> you'll have
>
> Your daughter covered with a Barbary
>
> Horse, you have your nephews neigh to you;
>
> You'll have courses for cousins
>
> And jennets for germane". (Shakespeare, 1603/2016,1.1.111-114)

The blend of the couple's blood is "gainst all rules of nature" (1.3.101). It is a racial and a cultural transgression to marry "such as thing" (1.2.71) as Othello. The violent hostility expressed by the Venetian nobility is, according to Ania Loomba, "closely related to the idea of racial purity or 'limpiezia de sangre' [the limpidity of blood] (my translation) as opposed to those who had been contaminated by mixing with […] Moors" (Loomba, 2002, p.7). This colonial perspective suggests that precise criteria must determine the geographical and cultural boundaries following the race and ethnic specificities.

A hostile opposition will counter any attempt to violate this colonial paradigm. Part of the resistance strategies to the threat that Othello poses is an overwhelming presence of animal

imagery. In her book *Shakespeare's Imagery and What it Tells Us* (2001), Caroline Spurgeon thinks that "the main image in Othello is that of animals in action, preying upon one another, mischievous, lascivious, [and] cruel" (Spurgeon, 2001, p. 335). It is funny to notice that the overlap between ethnicity and sexuality often "shows up in the context of horses" (Habib, 2000, p.32). Iago's speech highlights, indeed, the emphatic presence of this "horse register" as "[a] marker of pure race lineage" (Habib, 2000, p. 23).

The Venetians consider Othello's demeanour as a crime that deserves punishment. The Senate scene of Act I, scene 3, which turns out to be a trial, illustrates very well the hostile behaviour of the noble patriarchal society: "the vocabulary and imagery of trial and legal process become visually and appositionally realised when we view the senate scene with the duke as judge, the senators as jury, Barbantio as accuser, Othello as defendant and Desdemona as an expert witness" (Sanders, 2003, p.37). The allegations of sexual intercourse between a white Lady representing the purity and the uniqueness of the Venetian blood and a black Moor representing a foreign threat and anti-Christian values are not only levelled against Othello but also under-attack Desdemona. Desdemona is thus fiercely accused of contaminating the purity of the white race: "sexual contact across races and cultures is scandalous" (Loomba, 2002, p.41). Othello's marriage with Desdemona is condemned since it causes a fissure in the uncontaminated bases of Venetian society. This marital union conveys an immoral, lustful base association between a white purity that should not be loathed, and devilish animalistic pollution embodied by the Moor

> Zounds, sir, you're robbed! For shame, put on your gown.
>
> Your heart is burst, you have lost your soul.
>
> Even now, now, very now, an old black ram
>
> Is tupping your white ewe. Arise, arise,
>
> ……………………………………….
>
> Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you. (Shakespeare, 1603/2016, 1. 1.88-93)

The hostility and prejudice against Othello reinforce a paradigm of diametrical opposition between the self and otherness. This self/other construction has to do with the early

formations of the colonial identity and the self-justification ideology of colonialism. What gives the Venetians' hostility distinct features is the "mingling of the public political action caused by the Turkish threat of Cyprus with the domestic and private crisis of Othello's marriage" (Salgado & Salgado, 1989, p.16). The question of Desdemona's marriage without her father's consent would not have been of crucial importance were Othello a white Venetian. Barbantio "is trapped in the cultural stereotype of a black man as ugly, cruel, lustful, dangerous, near cousin to the devil himself" (Salgado, 1989, p.87). Marriage is treated as a cultural conflict. The Turkish background, the Muslim-Christian war and the battle of Lepanto in *Othello* signify the play's cardinal position in dealing with issues of race and miscegenation. Cross-pollination and miscegenation are taboos in the play. Their danger lies in the threat they represent against the powerful colonial discourse that emphasises the legitimacy of creating clear-cut boundaries between races that are impossible to be blurred.

From this perspective, the ethnic difference becomes a creation that justifies the invented taxonomy and hierarchies between different bloodlines. When Barbantio accuses Othello of witchcraft, he demonstrates a prejudice based on racial differences against the Moor. For him, his daughter is "abused" by a barbarous "Moor" who casts his magic charms on her, as Moors were well-known for their practice of magic. The magic of the mysterious East was the subject of many legends in Middle Ages Europe. The Arabs were thought to practise sorcery, shape-shifting duels, spell breaking, conjuring spirits, contacts with Djinns, talismans, astrology, and dervishes. Lewis Spence, in his book *Legends and Romances of Spain* (2010), in which he details Medieval and Renaissance accounts of magic, thinks that

> Spain seems to have been regarded by the other countries of Western Europe as the special abode of superstition, sorcery, and magic, probably because of the notoriety given to the discoveries of the Moorish alchemists, the first scientists in Europe […] By no race was the practice of the occult arts studied with such perseverance as by the Moors of Spain. The statement that they were famous for magical and alchemical studies is reiterated by numerous European historians. However, the majority of these have refrained from any description of their methods. The Moors themselves have left so few undoubted memorials of their labours in this direction that we remain in considerable ignorance of the trend of their efforts so that if we desire any knowledge upon this most recondite subject we must perforce collect it painfully from the

fragmentary notices of it in contemporary European and Arabic literature. (Spence, 2010, p.347)

Othello contains other clichéd images about the exotic Middle East. The handkerchief is made in Egypt: "That handkerchief did an Egyptian to my mother give/she was a charmer, and almost read/ the thoughts of people" (Shakespeare, 1603/2016, 3.4.52-55). Egypt, in the Renaissance culture, was associated with exoticism and mystery. A few lines after, Othello declares explicitly: "Tis true. There is magic in the web of it" (3.4.65). The association between Othello the Moor, Egypt, witchcraft, and magic makes the Eastern world a mysterious space of soothsayers in total contrast with the enlightened Venetian world. This is precisely the realm in which dark-skinned people exist.

This antithetical equation is linguistically expressed in two different sets of jargon. One emphasises "wit", meanwhile the other stresses "witchcraft". This polarisation is described by Iago, who avows: "thou know'st we work by wit and not by witchcraft" (2.2.18-19). Wit and witchcraft, in their juxtaposition, echo the distance that separates Othello from Venetian society. Wit pertains to the centre/Iago; meanwhile, witchcraft relates to the periphery/Othello. A scrutiny of the characters reveals that Iago is presented as "the self-conscious possessor of brain power" (Heilman, 1972, p.7). The ensign generates arguments of reason: "but we have reason to cool our raging motions" (Shakespeare, 1603/2016, 1.3. 310). The play seems to make Iago the clued-up centre of the action and reduce Othello to a passive formula of Iago's exploits. Moreover, "references to Othello's 'thick lips, sooty bosom' and 'animal lust' […] mark him out as both inferior and alien" (Loomba, 2005, p.60). The beginning of the play demonstrates the immeasurable hatred Iago has towards Othello. This situation is more complex than a simple personal battle between two individuals; it is a conflict between two cultures that embodies how one civilisation disdainfully rejects the other.

The race /religion intertwining unveils the ambivalent discourse on otherness. Religion and its connection with race are the tools that reveal the limitations of the hegemonic representation of the concept of race. The "Moor" in *Othello* is Christian, and as Loomba argues, "religion was seen to confer certain moral as well as physical traits […]; [but] neither religion nor race can replace the racial purity. (Loomba, 2002, p.25). Imtiaz Habib comments on the limitations of the Christian religious scriptures and interpretations as far as the question of race, and social hierarchy are concerned: "[according to the Bible], all human beings were

the children of the same God [but] they were sorted out into servants and masters, the accursed and the blessed, the black and the white" (Habib, 2000, p.19).

From the perspective of the pictorial blackness of the Moor, his whole ideological makeup rests on the assumption that blackness is a visual sign and a leading signifier of inner debasement and degradation. In the field of performance and staging, the concept of blackness functions as a screen onto which the Western discourse of binary oppositions is projected. Indeed, traditional literary studies distinguish between the "performing text" and the "text". According to Andernahr, Lovell and Wolkowitz, theatre criticism employs "a threefold distinction between the 'play text' –the material text of the play; the performance text –the script which contains theatrical instructions to actors; and the production text – the individual and unique staging of the play by a company" (2000, p.195). For this reason, casting Othello is a critical issue in postcolonial criticism. Postcolonialists have regularly approved theatrical studies to shed light on the cultural and historical representation of race and gender. In the case of *Othello,* dying white actors' faces with black coal instead of resorting to black actors to perform the role of Othello is another indication of the degree of the inability of Western society to digest blackness. This example can only produce a grotesque copy of the noble Moor.

The colonial construction of the Moor's identity functions based on conflicting opposites. Indeed, the vocabulary used demonstrates a clash between white/black, Christian/Muslim, Venetian/Moor, Venus/Cyprus, Desdemona/Othello and Iago/Othello. The conflicting relation between these opposites is not phenomenal; in other words, it is not based on reaction versus counter-reaction. These relations are rather conventional and constructed; they are not inherent but imposed by the hegemonic power. For Althusser, this is part of the "repressive State Apparatuses" (Althusser, 2014, p.2) that support the governing system's reproduction by creating ideologically hardened subjects and are accustomed to acknowledging the values of this system.

Constructing an identity for the Moor from a colonialist perspective could be traced through the interpretation of the dramatic text and the use of language. The speeches of Othello demonstrate his skilful use of metaphors and imagery that reinforces his image as an exotic hero. His words at the beginning of the play reveal a sense of jeopardy and beauty. The "bright swords" mingle with "dew" to give the audience the feeling that he is an impressive character and a powerful speaker. This power is emphasised in the scene when Othello mentions "the bloody book of law" (Shakespeare, 1603/2016, 1.3.68). His long speeches and the orderliness

of his verse in the first two acts could be compared to poems. Othello speaks in blank verse, underpinning his portrayal as a man of romance, a mixture of fantasy and legendary heroism. In addition, Othello's poetic language juxtaposes the rational Venetian language: "the Othello music […] belongs not to the play but to Othello himself" (Salgado & Salgado, 1986, p.15). The Moor's zeal to ascertain his sameness and nobility leads him to a diametrically opposite result. The "Othello music" has "a certain expansiveness of rhythm, a measured and steady fullness of speech which is felt as much in the many open vowel sounds as in the unfaltering control of syntax […] it is typically associated with the force of nature rather than with civilisation" (Salgado & Salgado, 1986, p.15). Othello, then, internalises the discourse of otherness and the rhetoric of binary oppositions: prosaic/poetic and rational/emotional. He, consequently, seeks "self-fashioning"[1] in the sense that he attempts to construct a public image that obeys the set of the socially acceptable standards of his Venetian society. In his willingness to acquire "sameness", he unconsciously intensifies his "otherness". When he is upset: "Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore; / […] better have been born a dog" (Shakespeare, 1603/2016, 3.3.360-364). He equates Desdemona's presumed unfaithfulness to his blackness: "Her name that was fresh/As Diana's visage, in now black/As mine own face" (3, 3, 388-390) and starts to slur, he employs the same images that Iago uses to insult him.

When Othello begins to perceive himself through the corrupted vision of Iago, he degenerates as well as his idiom does to confirm his position as an outsider, a barbarian. His eloquent style breaks down and disintegrates to show a fractured sense of the self through his lexis and syntax

> Lie with her, lie on her? We say lie on her,
>
> when they belie her! Lie with her, zounds! That's
>
> fulsome! Handkerchief! Confessions! Handkerchief!
>
> To confess, and be hanged for his labour! First, to be

---

[1] Stephen Greenblatt coined the term "self-fashioning" in his book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (2005) to refer to the landmarks of constructing identity and literature in Renaissance England.

Hanged, and then to confess: I tremble at it […]

It is not words that shakes me thus. Pish!

Noses, ears and lips. Is't possible?

Confess? Handkerchief! O devil! (Shakespeare, 1603/2016, 4.1.35-41)

Previously, the Moor used the first and the third person, which reveals his status as a hero; now, he resorts to pronouns such as "we", "they", and "his" that illustrate his fall. His reliance on interrogative forms, his employment of disjointed prose rather than measured verse and his use of insulting expressions like "zounds" suggest his insecurity. They also draw the degree of Othello's fall as he talks the same way as the ensign. In the last part of this speech, the audience struggles to give any sense to Othello's words: "Pish! Noses […]" Othello's self-control and his sense of dignity give way to verbal bullying; his utterances become monosyllabic: "Fetch't, let me see,t […] Fetch me the handkerchief. My mind misgives […] The Handkerchief! [...] The handkerchief! […] The handkerchief! [...] Zounds! (3.4.80-98). Othello's fury in act three and his words "O, blood, blood, blood" suggest his violent nature proper to his race. In his rage, he confirms the Venetian's attitude, and even his negative view, about the baseness of his skin colour

I'd whistle her off and let her down the wind

To prey at fortune. Haply for I am black,

And have not those soft parts of conversation

That chamberers have […]. (3. 3. 264-267)

His final speech demonstrates his acknowledgement of his bestial and barbaric bloody nature. He compares himself to "the base Indian" (5.2.345) and "the circumcised dog" (5.2.353).

Consequently, Othello's language echoes Iago's manipulative discourse, packed with colonial stereotypes and tropes. Iago uses animal imagery and insulting metaphors to disparage Othello's heritage background. The use of expressions like "an old black ram", "Barbary horse", "sooty bosom", and "thick lips" reinforce the status of Othello as a constant threat against the idea of "white purity". Venetians rarely call Othello by his name. He is, in most cases, labelled as "the Moor". The colonial discourse on otherness allows the Venetian identity

to emerge as superior to the Moor's, who, despite his adjustment to Western behaviour, can never equate to the position of a Westerner. Loomba confirms that: "language […] is […] implicated in constructing the binary of a European self and a non-European other" (Loomba, 2005, p.73). Thus, the presence of the Moor becomes necessary for the Western Venetians to see their virtues in the defects of the other.

Within this framework of antagonism between Othello and Venetians, the concept of intertextuality in the postcolonial reading of *Othello* sounds appropriate. It is legitimate to consider the play as inhabited by a multitude of voices or texts and moulded by the power relations of its age. Intertextualising the play explains how the dramatic text is mediated through, or filtered by, "codes" imparted to the writer and reader by other texts. In this context, Iago appears as a force whose sole purpose is to counter-attack the threat of heterogeneity represented by the Moor lies in his importance in the play. Without Iago, there would have been no Othello. This character did not figure in the source of the play *Gli Hecatomithi* (1566) by Giraldi Cinthio. It is Shakespeare who invents this character.

Secondly, knowing that Iago is a Spanish name for James and admitting that James was the king of England when Shakespeare wrote *Othello*, legitimate questions are to be raised. How does Shakespeare bestow on his villainous character the name of the ruling king of England at that time? Was he not afraid of censorship and being accused of the *lése- majesté* crime?

The answer to these questions is found in history and is given by Barbara Everett in her article "Spanish Othello" (1982). Saint James is indeed the Saint patron of Spain. He is commemorated in the village of Santiago de Compostela in northwest Spain. He is wildly renowned as a heavenly figure who appeared to fight with the Spanish against the Moors in the battle of Clavijo in the 11th century. He is also known as *Santiago Matamoros* or Saint James the Moor-killer. This interpretation corroborates the idea that Iago, in *Othello*, is not meant to be the villain of the piece but the one to kill the Moor and bring order back to the state of Venice. Reading Iago from this perspective reinforces the ideas of Said that Shakespeare, among other Western scholars, has fictionalised the Orient.

From another perspective, but always from the standpoint of the Saidian theory, the concept of the "journey" is embedded in the texture of the Euro/ethnocentric discourse. In *Orientalism* (2003), Said states: "[…] an internally structured archive is built up from the

literature that belongs to these experiences. Out of this comes a restricted number of typical encapsulations: the journey, the history, the fable, the stereotype, and the polemical confrontation. These are the lenses through which the Orient is experienced, and they shape the language, perception, and form the encounter between East and West" (Said, 2003, p.58). In Othello, the Moor attracts Desdemona through the stories he tells about the "Orient". She is charmed by his stories about: "the cannibals that each other eat/ […] and men whose heads/ Do grow beneath their shoulder" (Shakespeare, 1603/2016, 1, 3. 43-44). Othello will later confess that: "she loved me the dangers I had passed" (1, 3, 167). Thus, a Fanonian[2] reading powerfully suggests itself, Othello as a "white-masked" man expresses his will to distance himself from the other fellow Moors. He wants to mark a demarcation from the "monstrous non-European he has seen in his travels" (Loomba, 2005, p. 60).

Reading *Othello* from a postcolonial perspective is enriching because it tackles the issues of race and gender from a different perspective than the Western canon. It has its contributions since it allows the reading of the play from an ideological viewpoint and denounces a common unconscious collective of a Western society that adopts expansionist and colonialist aspirations. It also encourages the review of the allegedly Western hegemonic status opening fractures in the over-confident, sometimes dogmatic, foundations of the Western view of the world. It also suggests that the undercurrent between the "source' and "the context" is dynamic and that "the intertext" is legitimate in the reading of literature. It finally gives a voice to a new generation of postcolonial thinkers whose ancestors were voiceless for ages.

However, there are certain areas of ambiguity that the postcolonial theory has proven itself unable to elucidate and will be the focus of concentration in the coming parts of my analysis. In his book *Post Colonial Con-texts* (2002), John Thieme offers a critical reading of the background of postcolonialism. In this perspective, he affirms that "the canon to which [postcolonial critics] were writing back was far from unitary and that the texts to which they were responding were unstable objects that were, in effect, being constructed anew by each

---

[2] *The Columbia Encyclopaedia* (2000) states about Frantz Fanon: "1925–61, French West Indian psychiatrist, author, revolutionary, and leader of the Algerian National Front, b. Martinique […] His first book, Black Skin, White Masks (1952, tr. 1967), is a psychoanalytic study of black life and the internalization of racism in a white-dominated world" (para.1).

postcolonial writer's gaze in a kind of parodic reversal of the process by which postcolonial subjects had been constructed" (Thieme, 2002, p.2).

In addition, postcolonial criticism, as is the case of any theory that attempts to read a literary text only from one targeted angle, forgets very important dimensions in the text of Shakespeare since its primary focus is on ideology and power in the Shakespearean text. It is worthy to note that apart from Jyotsna G. Singh, who, in *Colonial Narratives/Cultural Dialogues* (1996) and *Shakespeare and Postcolonial Theory* (2019), has built a bridge between postcolonialism and adaptations of Shakespeare within a postcolonialist context, there are very few critics who endeavoured to consider performance possibilities from the lens of postcolonialism. Singh indeed specified one chapter in her book mentioned above entitled "Shakespeare and the 'civilizing mission'" where she studies first "the Shakespearean text in postcolonial India" (Singh, 1996, p.135), then she gives "a selective overview of some local stage versions of [Shakespeare's] works in Bengali (1996, 136) to prove that there exists a constant metamorphosis of Shakespeare's adaptations on the Indian stage. Among the areas that postcolonialist researchers have neglected, in this case, is the self-migratory nature of the Shakespearean dramatic text that focuses on the "afterlife" of this text in a modern Western or North African and "Moorish" environment. Performance is a crucial dimension in drama. Plays are reinvented each time they are performed. A play like *Othello* acquires new dimensions in performance; its different meanings are continuously remade in subsequent performances as they are subjected to 'ever-renewed confrontation' by actors, directors, designers, and audiences. In this vein, Feriel J. Ghazoul emphasises the importance of a play like *Othello* in Middle Eastern and Arab cultures. She highlights in her article entitled "The Arabization of *Othello*" (1998) that

> No work of Shakespeare touches chords of Arab sensibility and identity so much as the tragedy of *Othello*. For one thing, the hero is a Moor and, therefore, an "Arab." Furthermore, he is not simply an Arab character in an Arab context; he is an Arab in Europe, necessarily evoking all the complex confrontations of Self/Other in the context of a power struggle. Then, it is not surprising to learn that the first translation and production of a Shakespearean play in Arabic was the *Othello,* performed in Egypt in 1884. (Ghazoul, 1998, p.1)

3.   **Othello in Tunisia: The transmigratory nature of the dramatic text**

However, the interest in the racial and cultural paradigms has not been an obsession for all Arab directors. In North Africa, for example, and in Tunisia in particular, one can note at least two different performances of the Shakespearean play where the acculturation of the prince transgresses the racial and ideological paradigms[3]. The first adaptation is by Tawfiq Al Jibali and his company *El Teatro*, first performed in 1997[4]. Al Jibali's adaptation relied on Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's translation of Shakespeare into Arabic. Along with him, Malak Al-Sebai is the choreographer, while Zied Al Tawati performs the role of Othello and Afaf al-Hajji the role of Desdemona. Dobson and Wells introduce, in *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare* (Dobson &Wells, 2015), Al Jibali's adaptation as follows

---

[3] Feriel Ghazoul (1998) details Jabra's translation of the Shakespearean text insisting on Jabra's willingness to respect the original text during the translation process: "In his introduction, one senses his acute awareness of the entrenched Mutran version which he I supposed to surpass. Not the least of Jabra's advantages is that he translated from English. Still, he feels called upon to explain why he has changed the names of the characters as commonly known in the Arab world since the Mutran translation. Except for Othello, Jabra transliterates them to reflect the English pronunciation. Although Jabra disagrees with Mutran's explanation of the Arab origin of the name Othello, he still feels he must adhere to Mutran's legacy on this score. The hero-and by extension the title of the play-retains the name of'Utayl. Jabra's introduction gives the source of Othello (Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*, 1566) as well as the textual history of the play. Furthermore, he opts to preface his translation with A. C. Bradley's famous study of Othello that figured in his Shakespearean Tragedy" (Ghazoul, 1998, pp.4-5).

[4] Much before Tawfik Al Jibaly and Muhmmad Driss, *Othello* was performed in Tunisia in 1908 by Mahmoud Bourguiba. Hamadi Ben Halima, in his book *Un Demi Siècle de Théâtre Arabe en Tunisie* (1974) [*Half a Century of Arabic Theatre in Tunisia* (my translation)] has given an account of this performance (pp. 34-35). Ben Halima has also described a 1920 production of Othello in Tunisia with the famous Tunisian singer Habiba Messika playing the role of Desdemona (pp. 161-163).

Two characters, a white Othello and a black Desdemona, keep dancing or watching a television set displaying extracts from a second world war. (p. 537)

Dobson and Wells' description of the adaptation of *Othello* does not conclude that the Pinteresque atmosphere of the play and the director's reliance only on dark skin colour for both actors is a means by the director to deconstruct the classical racial and ideological paradigms of *Othello.* The director derails the classical racial paradigm of *Othello* by deconstructing the grand narrative that Desdemona is white and Othello is black. The director, indeed, and unlike the description given by *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare* (Dobson &Wells, 2015), opted for the same dark skin colour for both Othello and Desdemona. Tawfik Al Jibali stresses, in an interview given to the London-based pan-Arab journal *Al Hayat*[5] that his interest has been directed more to the character of Othello rather than *Othello* within the Shakespearean universe and the Early Modern England context

Othello did not define my choice, nor was it entirely justified. It could have been another text. Then I opted for the character of Othello more than Shakespeare's world as a historical institution. I liked Othello because his personality traits are similar to the ones who use force, violence and power in our societies, whether in an organised way within states or individually as public figures. (Chabaneh, 1998, para.2)

It is evident from the above lines that the Tunisian director is keen on focusing on Othello's personality traits from a universal perspective rather than from a paradigmatic narrow ideological angle where forced confrontations between the West and the Middle East are highlighted. Al Jibali's interest in Othello comes from the fact that the prince holds emotional, psychological, and philosophical complexities of a universal dimension. Talking about his interest in Othello as a personality, the Director stresses the fragility of Othello and his

---

[5] Al Jibali was interviewed by the journalist Omar Chabaneh who published the interview in *Al Hayat* journal in 1998. His article is entitled "He transformed *Othello* from Myth to Reality. Tawfik Al Jibali: The Arab Theatre is at his Worst". The article was published in Arabic. All the quotations from the article are my translation. The article is available online at the following link: https://www.sauress.com/alhayat/30964904

complexity, which makes him akin to a real individual and not a stereotype or a mythical character carrying exotic features to satisfy a Western reading

> Then there is his paranoia, being a soldier, akin to organised violence […] I also addressed his naiveté in extrapolating facts in a very phantasmagorical way. He presents himself as a tragic, delicate person with a guilt complex. These elements heat the debate concerning whether Othello is a myth or an individual sharing the same features as all humans. Othello could be read as a myth, but I brought him down to earth and made him part of a general reality governed by the logic of violence within intellectual foundations and theoretical mechanisms. (Chabaneh, 1998, para.4)

Tawfik Al Jibali's *Othello* shuns the artistic visual components of the original Shakespearean play. Indeed, both Othello and Desdemona are cast as dark-skinned. During the preparation of the present research, I have undertaken a thirty-five-minute interview with the play director, who has insisted on shunning the classical racial, and ethnic paradigms opposing Othello to Desdemona in favour of a reading that stages the opposition between two complex characters, both responsible for the tragic outcome of their mutual understanding. Rafik Darragi, in his article "The Tunisian Stage: Shakespeare's Part in Question" (2007) published in *Critical Survey,* explains that the synopsis of the performance introduced by *El Teatro* company "does not reveal much about this adaptation, though it alludes to the notion that an all-white world, today, is simply a fantasy or an anachronism." (2007, p. 99). The colour subversion adopted by the Tunisian director re-negotiates Western pre-conceived ideas that the Moor's dark colour makes him impulsive. In the interview given to *Al Hayat* journal, he blatantly acknowledges his deliberate intention to change the colour of his actors and to ignore the racial stereotype as a pretext for the murder

> I wanted to drop the racist shortcuts justifying the murder of Desdemona by Othello. I did not want him to correspond to the cliché of the euphoric rash Middle Eastern against a civilised blonde. Desdemona is partly responsible for the violence in the play because she constantly remains silent and never retaliates to stop the abuses of Othello. (Chabaneh, 1998, para. 6)

Even though the director has shunned the binary racial paradigm, he aesthetically adapts the duality of black and white colours for visual and aesthetic effects. When he has been asked

about the reason beyond his sole reliance on black and white in his play, he insists that colours are pompous manifestations of ornamentation that could affect the overall message of his play

> We did not use colours because colours suggest decorations, and we do not want that. Even clothes do not use colour except during the imaginary moments where characters change and transform in front of the mirror. Our primary interest was in communicating the abstract idea of misunderstanding between Desdemona, who sees Othello as a legend, a myth; meanwhile, he is a reality. (Chabaneh, 1998, para. 8)

As for the blackness of Othello, it has gone beyond the direct racial matter or the straightforward visual colour since he confers to it a symbolic dimension. Indeed, the Tunisian director claims to compare Othello's grievances to the present-day Arab citizen who suffers from a systematic feeling of self-loathing. Al Jibali ascertains that his adaptation is not a social treatment but a shift of roles between what he considers a Homeric hero and a life-like familiar person. Thus, his approach is modernist since he aims to bring a slice of life of a daily life unit on stage. In that vein, talking about Othello, he states

> I found that his contempt for being black - he keeps repeating "because I am black" - is like what Arab men are now. That is why my treatment was not social but rather a role-playing game, a shift between the typical hero and the real man who ascends and then falls into a game that leads to the union of reality with imagination. (Chabaneh, 1998, para. 9)

Moreover, it seems that the preoccupation of Al Jibali, who is a North African director, has gone beyond the awareness of any racial tension. The director does not seem to be preoccupied with the tension caused by ethnicity. There are no references to Barbantio or Iago, and the actors' performance is mainly based on choreography and dancing on a bare stage with only white and black colours for the dressing code and the props. He even goes further by using intertextuality, injecting parts of Iago's tempting speech to Desdemona herself. Both the director and Desdemona do not need Iago to portray concepts of temptation and jealousy. Metaphorically speaking, Al Jibali erases the Santiago Matamoros that Barbara Everette has developed, as the earlier part of the analysis has shown.

The director's preoccupation with white and black colours takes an aesthetic dimension. In the interview given to *Al Hayat* newspaper, he acknowledges that the "value of the Shakespearean text resides in its poetic dimension" (Chabaneh, 1998, para. 1). He has also

accentuated the importance of considering aesthetic devices as one of the main objectives of a play director. As an answer to Omar Chabaneh's question about his concentration on choreography, scenic effects and aesthetic components of his performance that could be read as elements reducing the power of the Shakespearean text, he maintains that he believes that

> aesthetic elements can be considered a goal in a performance. In our play, movements, dancing, and choreography are a language. We created a kinetic "grammar" proper to the characters not to remind us of expected social behaviour […] The visual elements do not contradict the performance structure. My scenography is a space of reflection that accentuates doubleness, binaries in some sequences, and uniqueness, narcissism, paranoia, and schizophrenia in others. There has also been a space for femininity, beauty, and the paradoxes between the two personalities. To me, the Theatrical space is a pot that contains all the elements mentioned above eloquently. (Cahabaneh, 1998, para.4)

An examination of the director's intentions re-enforces the fact that his play relies on impressionistic techniques where theatre is psychologised, dancing replaces written text, and visual elements convey a message. The use of props has been psychologised and symbolic. The sensuality of Desdemona, her femaleness and the sexual intertwining between Othello and Desdemona have been reinforced by the director's use of feathers as a prop to portray the nuptial bed of the couple. Mirrors with defective reflections are used to symbolise the incapacity of the characters to cope with their current situations. The theatrical space, for the director, is a stage more than a text. In the play, his sole concern is conveying the idea of evil and ugliness from an aesthetic angle without being obsessed with any conflict opposing the West to the Middle East. Even lighting and music are used for the service of his overall message

> Our use of lighting aims to enhance people's behaviour's ugliness but in a beautiful visual form. The lighting techniques I used are relatively simple and not complicated. However, they signal the violence, cruelty, and oppression we all see at the doors of prisons or on statues and monuments. (Cahabaneh, 1998, para.10)

Indeed, the lighting techniques used in the play are simple and "raw", as the director calls them. Monochromic key and fill lights set the tone of the play. They brighten the front from two slightly opposite directions, emphasising the idea of dualities that the play director aims to cast. The backlight has been used to enhance the separation of actors from the setting in certain

situations. It has been removed each time the director wants to merge the two characters in slow-paced choreography. As for the side lights, they have been used from single directions to produce shadows of characters in motion on the floor or walls. The director did not use spot fixtures to focus on the characters' facial expressions; he used low dipping light to portray them dancing or verbally interacting with each other. Despite the simplicity of lighting devices and the absence of gels and colour filters, the director's interest in the aesthetic visual dimensions of his performance remains strong.

Tawfik Al Jibali's *Othello* concerns questions of sensuality, power, and injustice from a macrocosmic dimension. The intertwining between Othello and Desdemona in his play attempts to trace the boundaries between what the director calls the mythical and the realistic. The conflict in his adaptation is double-fold. On the one hand, Desdemona sees Othello as a myth, an embodiment of an epic Homeric hero. On the other hand, Othello is presented as a realistic character with weaknesses, fallibilities, and a complex personality. The director insists that the barriers he has made between Othello and Desdemona are of an intellectual and political order (Chabaneh, 1998, para. 11).

From another perspective, Al Jebali's play suggests possible political interpretations, but they are more of a universal dimension rather than a specific narrow ethnic one. The director introduces intra-diegetic devices such as a TV set with two significant projections. The first is a selection from the famous American director, actor, screenwriter, and producer Orson Welles' 1951 film version of *Othello,* who has put Shakespeare in the box via the screen version of the play. The second one is a clip of a famous speech by George W. Bush's declaration of war on Iraq during what is known as the first Gulf War. The director's embedding of intra-diegetic devices is a metatheatrical act par excellence. Not only do audiences watch the performance and the dancing of two actors, but they also observe these two actors on stage, being transformed into an audience for TV projections. Actors on stage become, thus, spectators and heighten the illusory nature of the theatrical craft. Orson Welles' performance of *Othello* on the stage of Tawfik Al Jibali becomes a form of anti-theatre, a theatre put in a box, a kind of mise en abyme theatre that highlights the artificial notion of the theatrical happening. Independently, from the director's interpretation of the injection of the above-mentioned metatheatrical sequences, it is evident that the postcolonial equation of Othello does not haunt the director in terms of stagecraft and aesthetics.

Regarding the director's view concerning his use of TV projections, he expresses his intentional aim to problematise the ideas of violence and repression. He also aims at enhancing the notion of lack of communication between Othello and Desdemona, which is, according to him, a result of the overall dominating violence due to the hegemonic presence of institutional state apparatuses involved in intrigue, stratagems, then bloodshed.

> My goal was to establish a dialectical link between the repressive interior space in which Desdemona lives, such as her bed and the exterior outer space through the most powerful communication tool— television, through which we have been transmitted scenes of violence and wars through police series. Today's intellectual system is framed by violence that enslaves humans and shapes their emotions, thinking, and being. In Orson Welles' Othello, I have found war, conspiracy, espionage, and murder. That is why I have taken it as an example. Also, I found Bush's declaration of war against Iraq a representation of violence: There is war in the city, and people's hearts are seized by fear. (Chabaneh, 1998, para.7)

Al Jibali's use of many texts, scenes, stages, and discourses makes his play a site of non-radicalism. His approach is postmodern and not postcolonial since it deconstructs the grand narratives of figures of power, whether related to the Moorish Othello or the great personalities of the West appearing in the TV projections. Not only what Othello stood for as a legendary figure has been subverted, but also the discourse and the scenes of violence have been transferred from Othello to iconic Western figures. All is about experimentation and gaming; the ones expected to guarantee peace and humanism and promote universal values of welfare and equality are projected on a TV screen to mirror the grievances of humanity in a postmodern theatrical message delivered by the director.

Although Dobson and Wells (2015) have not commented on Al Jibali's shunning of the canonical antagonism between the West and the Middle East while reading *Othello*, they succeeded in catching the captivating, playful aspect of his adaptation. In that vein, they believe that the adaption displays: a "double-edged satirical barb aimed at both racism and war." (p. 537). The message of Al Jibali is of a universalist dimension; for him, skin colour does not count when it is a matter of human fallibilities such as war and jealousy. As for wars and battlefields, they are not narrowed down to a Moorish warrior fighting in Cyprus or the Mediterranean; they are of a world dimension, as the speech of George Bush has suggested in the play. As for jealousy, both Othello and Desdemona are portrayed as olive-skinned only to

suggest that this devouring feeling transcends races and ethnicity and to highlight the mutual responsibility of both Desdemona and Othello in sealing their fate.

Figure 1 *Othello*, 1997. by Tawfik Al Jibaly. Afaf Al Hajji as Desdemona and Zied Al Twati as Othello. Photo by *El Teatro*

Figure 2 The poster of *Othello*, 1997. by Tawfik Al Jibaly. Afaf Al Hajji as
Desdemona and Zied Al Twati as Othello. Photo by *El Teatro*

The second adaptation is by Mohammed Driss[6] *Etoile d'un Jour,* or *The One Day Star,* performed in 2007[6]. Dobson and Wells (2015) introduce Driss' adaptation of *Othello* by describing the performance's fragmentary structure, which is teeming with silences and musical interludes. They also emphasise Driss' use of Tunisian vernacular language and local idioms and praise the Director's complex and skilful stagecraft that has departed from the original Shakespearean text

> Though packed with many silent scenes and musical interludes, this work follows Shakespeare's dramatic structure. Using vernacular, metaphorical language mingled with proverbs, the translator and director showed a skilful knowledge of stagecraft. Like Tawfik Al Jibali's work, the military atmosphere is very much emphasized throughout the play. In addition to the various battle scenes (soldiers fighting with explosives and Kalashnikovs), many actors appear on stage in modern army uniform. (Dobson & Wells, 2015, p.537)

The variations from the original text and the local touch added using vernacular Tunisian as well as present-day stagecraft confer a local effect on Driss' adaptation and corroborate the transmigratory nature of the Shakespearean original text[7].

Driss' adaptation of the text transcends the narrow ethnic dimension of *Othello* to cover, in the aftermath of September 11, more up-to-date issues having to do with male/female relationships and tolerance, "an ode to love and life" as he claimed in an interview with Rafik Darragi in the Tunisian newspaper *La Presse* (2007): "I do claim the choice for universality. No matter what the origin, no matter what the culture, no matter what the faith, I have no problem. (Darragi, 2007, p.104). Theatrically speaking, the relatively long musical interludes, dancing, acrobatics, and choreography mixed with the use of present-day props such as cellular

---

[6] Mohammed Driss was the director of the Tunisian National Theatre from 1988 until 2012.

[7] The study of the self-migratory nature of Othello from the script of William Shakespeare to the stage of Mohammed Driss will be thoroughly developed in a forthcoming paper.

phones suggest that the visual artistic construction of the performance is original and modern. Mohamed Driss' adaptation reflects his artistic inclinations as a director who privileges the corporal expression of his actors and embeds theatrical circus performances in his plays. It is worth noting that in 2003, Mohamed Driss founded the prestigious Circus School as part of the Tunisian National Theatre activities. Mohamed Driss exhibits the importance of music in his performance by introducing long musical intermezzi. The device of music could be read as an aesthetic negotiation of what has been known as the music of Othello, and his sweet, charming words and exotic stories told to Desdemona and his father. Driss's adaptation of *Othello* relies heavily on present-day props, notably cellular phones, suggesting that his characters, including Othello, transcend ages and cultures. Both Driss and Al Jibali are from North Africa, and both freed themselves from the anxiety of the racial paradigm in their interpretation of Othello. Neither of them was interested in providing rational explanations for the matter of race in the Shakespearean play.

Figure 3 *Othello*, 2007. by Mohamed Driss. Nedra Toumi as Desdemona and Jamal Sassi as Othello. Photo by *Theâtre National Tunisien*

Figure 4 *Othello*, 2007. by Mohamed Driss. Nedra Toumi as Desdemona and Jamal Sassi as Othello. Photo by *Theâtre National Tunisien*

A focus on the adaptations mentioned above suggests the presence of what Zied Ben Amor has called the "transmigratory nature of the Shakespearean text"[8] (Ben Amor, 2020,

---

[8] Zied Ben Amor (2020) uses the concept of "the transmigratory nature of the dramatic text" (p. 30) to suggest the idea that the original texts of the plays of Shakespeare inherently possess a transmigratory nature allowing new trajectories and dynamics as well as possible shifts and meanings from the original scripts to performances on stage and interpretations across ages and cultures. He, in that context, has worked on William Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1606/2009) and its adaptation by the German director Roberto Ciulli stating that the transmigratory nature of the Shakespearean has allowed Ciulli to re-invent " the gazes of the characters on pages by transforming the stage into an

p.30). As for *Othello*, the aesthetic qualities inherently suggested by the original text allow it to transcend cultural boundaries and paradigms of understanding to fit within a modern context. Indeed, because of its emphasis on ideology, postcolonialism tends to undermine a literary work's aesthetic dimension. This has been the case for decades. However, more recently, some fervent defenders of theory started to review their positions about the aesthetic dimension in reading and criticising a work of art. Linda Charnes (2003) is an example of these critics; in her article "We were Never Early Modern", which published in *Philosophical Shakespeares* (2003), she states

> It is time to get beyond the institutionalized debunking of the bourgeois autonomous or essentialist humanist self [...] If [Harold] Bloom is right about anything it is this: the world doesn't give a fig for our critiques of its epistemology. Post-humanism may exist in the academy but it won't be found in the hearts and minds of the book-buying public. For at least in Bloom's zesty world there's some humour, some poignancy and some openly avowed love of art. (Charnes, 2003, p. 56)

4.   Debunking postcolonialism

From another perspective, the systematic overconfident ideas of Edward Said that determine the relations between the West and the East and overemphasise the unjust nature of the Western discourse on the formerly colonised societies, particularly the Arab and Muslim ones, could promote simplistic stereotyping and accentuate a discourse of rejection built on self-victimisation. In her book *Writing after Postcolonialism Francophone North African Literature in Transition*, Jane Hiddleston explains that the spirit of postcolonialism constructed upon a binary opposition between the colonised self and the colonising other is still dominant whether in reading, criticising, or creating literature within North African writers and critics. Politicians belonging to the Muslim world accentuate the position of their culture as being

---

optical prism where theatrically blinded characters generate, each, optic rays loaded with possibilities of interpretations independent from the Shakespearean text, even while dealing with the very same theme of sight versus blindness". (Ben Amor, 2020, p. 30).

oppressed following a colonialist paradigm[9]. At the same time, researchers in politics and cultural studies have not detected the effects of a plain postcolonialist reading in shaping the relations between Middle Eastern and Western cultures. Although Maurits Berger, in his book *Religion and Islam in Contemporary International Relations* (2010), rejects the so-called "self-proclaimed protectors of Islam" as he calls them (Berger, 2010, p. 17), he does not mention the possibility that antagonism between the two cultures could be the result of a biased or a narrow reading of postcolonialism which is constructed on the idea of self-victimisation. Berger, instead, introduces the idea of misunderstanding to explain the dichotomy between the two cultures. He believes that the reason for the resentment of Muslim societies towards Western culture is the result of a combination between the colonial past and the contemporary Western continuous criticism of the Middle Eastern political home affairs due to the absence of democracy and non-respect for human rights in their countries (2010, p. 20). At the same time, Berger rejects that "self-victimization and the refusal of self-criticism" could be the cause of antagonism; he concludes that what separates the two worlds is a problem of "identity" (2010, p. 19).

From another perspective, if scholars, thinkers, and politicians from ex-colonised countries discarded the exaggeration of victimhood, extremist fanatics in many Middle Eastern and Asian countries would not have adopted a systematic discourse of self-victimization. Ibn Warraq discusses this idea thoroughly in his book *Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said's Orientalism* (2007). Ibn Warraq rejects ideas of Said about the West creating the other as inferior; he claims that Said's strategy prevents self-criticism, overemphasises self-victimisation, and neglects rationalism

---

[9] Many speeches by Muslim country leaders go in that sense. The Malaysian Prime Minister, for example, proclaims in the Kuala Lumpur Summit of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (1919) that colonizers oppress Muslims. More details about the Malaysian Prime Minister are in the following link:

https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3042838/we-have-caused-fear-islam-mahathir-mohamad-opens-kuala-lumpur

It takes courage for an Arab to write self-criticism of this kind; indeed, without the personal pronoun 'we', how many would have guessed that an Arab, let alone Edward Said himself, had written it? And yet, ironically, what makes self-examination for Arabs and Muslims, and particularly criticism of Islam in the West, very difficult is the pernicious influence of Edward Said's *Orientalism*. The latter work taught an entire generation of Arabs the art of self-pity – "were it not for the wicked imperialists, racists and Zionists, we would be great once more"- encouraged the Islamic fundamentalist generation of the 1980s, and bludgeoned into silence any criticism of Islam, and even stopped dead the research of eminent Islamologists who felt their findings might offend Muslim sensibilities, and who dared not risk being labelled "Orientalist". (Ibn Warraq, 2007, p. 18)

Strategically speaking, in his critical discourse about the West, Edward Said should not be considered an innovator. He did not usher in the tendency of condemning the Western canon. Different philosophers and thinkers preceded him. One could mention very few notorious names like G. W. Friedrich Hegel, Lord Byron, Percy B. Shelley, Samuel T. Coleridge, Friedrich Nietzsche, Immanuel Kant, Thomas Carlyle, William B. Yeats, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Mikhail Bakhtin, Virginia Woolf, Helene Cixous, Jacques Derrida, and the list is much longer. It is legitimate to say, by the end of the analysis, that Edward Said could have explained that the balance of powers in the Modern Age privileges the Western discourse because it happens that Westerners are in an actual position of power. At the same time, he could have made it clear that earlier times witnessed the predominance of other hegemonic non-Western discourses simply because they belonged to powerful nations. It is not, therefore, a matter of where one comes from but instead of how powerful the society one lives in is. Instead of fighting against the Western image of the "Orient, " has Said constructed a phantasmagorical image of the West? Probably, he started the elaboration of the basics of a framework that succeeded in paving the way for a generation of postcolonial writers to think critically. Postcolonial critics like Ania Loomba[10], Homi K. Bhabha[11] Imtiaz Habib[12], Jyotsna G. Singh[13],

---

[10] See *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (2005) and *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism* (2002).

[11] See *Nation and Narration* (1990) and *Edward Said Continuing the Conversation* (2005).

[12] See "Racial Impersonation on the Elizabethan Stage: The Case of Shakespeare Playing Aaron."

(2007), "Shakespeare's Spectral Turks: The Postcolonial Poetics of a Mimetic Narrative" (2004).

[13] *Colonial Narratives/Cultural Dialogues: "Discoveries" of India in the Language of Colonialism* (1996).

and Gayatri Spivak, to name but a few, are deeply influenced by the ideas of Edward Said; they have succeeded in adding precision and rigour to the Saidian theories in their reading of the Western literature. Today, it is essential that this generation of postcolonial critics assumes more responsibility in writing critical discourses about the "Orient", thus accomplishing what Edward Said himself could not achieve.

5.   The Global Renaissance

A vital area of study has emerged recently to view the relationship between the West on the one hand and the Middle East, Central Asia, India and the Orient on the other from a different angle. Jyotsna G. Singh has started to develop the concept of the Global Renaissance mainly through the two seminal works *A Companion to the Global Renaissance* (2009/ 2021) and *Shakespeare and Postcolonial Theory* (2019). Singh believes that the concept of the Renaissance is Eurocentric

> Traditionally, the term "Renaissance" has been deployed to denote a revival of classical antiquity and to valorize this revival in European art and culture of fifteenth-century Italy of Dante, Petrarch […] A term whereby the white, European man served as universal embodiment of superior civilisation and culture. (Singh, 2021, pp.4-5)

It is the notion of the superiority of the European culture that Singh has criticised with the focus on the idea that the Eurocentric concept of the Renaissance has ignored that knowledge, science, arts, and culture, in the early modern period were circulating between different civilisations such as the Arab one. Singh also highlights the role of trade and economy in helping the circulation of knowledge since assuring trade and business requires a global economy. Consequently, "new commercial practices were in turn shaped by Arabic economic structures, derived from earlier Arabic knowledge of algebra and mathematics" (Singh, 2021, p.5). Thus, the idea of the Global Renaissance has been introduced to advocate the fluidity of culture and its openness and to replace the traditionally centred and self-contained view promoting Italy as the hub of culture.

> The "Renaissance Man" is not a singular, heroic figure embodying the spirit of a culture, but is relocated within the historical phenomenon of an expanding global world, one which includes the discovery of America to the West, growing interactions, and encounters with East ranging from the Ottoman Empire on Europe's border to the far East, forays into North and sub-Saharan Africa, and even explorations to the North Seas. (Singh, 2021, p.5)

Two crucial areas of reflection are worth to be focused on from the perspective of the Global Renaissance. The first one is to read the plays of William Shakespeare and their adaptations from the lens of global inter-cultural interaction between different cultures and civilisations. The present research's earlier investigation of the two Tunisian adaptations has gone in that direction. Jyotsna Singh believes that the acculturation of Shakespeare's play within the aesthetic and cultural paradigms of the ex-colonised countries represents a new "turn" and a move from crude postcolonialism to a Global Shakespeare movement

> The Poetics and Politics of appropriation and inter-cultural encounters […] charts a new 'turn' in the postcolonial journey to the Global Shakespeare movement. In the past decade or so, new interpretations, productions, and conversations about deployments of Shakespeare's works beyond its canonical uses in the West […] have developed into a burgeoning field – a field in which issues of appropriation, representation, and power are central […] Quite remarkably, this recent, postcolonially infected, intercultural scholarship has expanded Shakespearean 'travels' into varied spaces and historical moments, often engaging with the local, the vernacular, and the liminal. (Singh, 2019, p. 127)

The concept of the Global Renaissance could bring together different readings of William Shakespeare's *Othello* and end interminable attempts to re-appropriate it within the confinements of one singular culture at the expense of another. Thanks to the concepts of the Global Renaissance and Global Shakespeare, discussions of the re-appropriation of *Othello* from Western, to Ottoman, to Cypriote angles that have been displayed, for example, by critics like Colm Mac Crossan in his article, "What, in a Town of War" (2020) or by R. M. Christofides in *Othello's Secret: The Cyprus Problem* (2016), and in his article entitled "Hamlet Versus Othello: Or, Why the White Boy Keeps Winning" (2021), do not stand anymore as antagonistic to each other; they instead make part of one Global Renaissance movement.

6.   Conclusion

The present article has attempted to start the analysis from a scholarly approach to Shakespeare's play *Othello* by demonstrating that both text and characters bear a postcolonialist reading par excellence; this first step of analysis has been, thus, an empirical attempt to tackle postcolonialism in practice and to investigate issues related to race, sexuality, alienation, hybridity, ethnicity, religion, and identity from the lens of imagery, lexical register, history, and religion. The crowning point of my analysis has endeavoured to go beyond a mere critical reception of the play according to a particular literary theory by raising a double-fold

reflection on postcolonialism in *Othello*. The first part of the reflection has been an invitation to recall the importance of theatrical and aesthetic dimensions in reading texts from multicultural or political sides. An invitation to study Tawfiq Al Jibali and Mohamed Driss' adaptations of *Othello* has been launched. In that vein, the analysis has suggested the use of what Zied Ben Amor calls the "transmigratory nature of the Shakespearean text" (2020, p. 30) to suggest the injection of aesthetic alternatives while dealing with dialogues and/ or confrontations between cultures so that ideology would not permeate the reading of the play. Reading the play from the lens of "the transmigratory nature" of the text has been a humble attempt to address the question of what happens when Othello is re-appropriated by North African stage directors. The last part of the reflection discusses the urgent call to review the reading of postcolonialism so that it would not serve the jargon of hatred, violence, and terrorism. It is, consequently, a call to critics from ex-colonised countries to move a step further in the study of the coloniser/colonised paradigm and think of a new area of criticism related to post-postcolonialism[14] and the readings of *Othello* and Shakespeare within the paradigm of the Global Renaissance and the Global Shakespeare movement.

References

Shakespeare, W., Honigmann, E. A. J., Thompson, A., & Shakespeare, W. (2016). *Othello* (Revised edition). Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare.

Shakespeare, W., Sanders, N., & Shakespeare, W. (2003). *Othello* (Updated ed). Cambridge University Press.

Shakespeare, W., & Shakespeare, W. (2009). *King lear* (R. A. Foakes & R. Proudfoot, Eds.). The Arden Shakespeare.

Secondary sources:

Althusser, L. (2014). *On the reproduction of capitalism: Ideology and ideological state apparatuses*. Verso.

Aljunied, K. (2020). Malaysia. Mahathir's Islam: Mahathir Mohamad on religion and modernity in Malaysia by Sven Schlottmann Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018. Pp. 243. Notes, bibliography, index. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, *51*(4), 633–635. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463420000752

---

[14] My expression.

Andermahr, S., Lovell, T., & Wolkowitz, C. (2000). *A Glossary of feminist theory* (1. publ). Arnold [u.a.].

Ben Amor, Z. (2020). Mapping Sight and Blindness in King Lear(s) of William Shakespeare and Roberto Ciulli: Towards a Poly-optic Reading. *International Review of Literary Studies*, 2(2), 14–33. https://irlsjournal.com/ojs/index.php/irls/article/view/21/13

Ben Halima, H. (1974). *Un Demi-siecle de Théâtre Arabe en Tunisie: 1907-1957*. Publications de l'Université de Tunis.

Berger, M. (2010). Religion and Islam in contemporary international relations. Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael".

Chabaneh, O. (1998). "He transformed Othello from myth to reality. Tawfik Al Jibali: The Arab Theatre is at its Worst". *Al Hayat*. https://www.sauress.com/alhayat/30964904

Charnes, Linda. (2003). "We were never early modern". In *Philosophical Shakespeares*. Routledge.

Christofides, R. M. (2016). *Othello's secret: The Cyprus problem*. Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare.

------------------------ (2021). Hamlet versus Othello: Or, why the white boy keeps winning. *Shakespeare*, *17*(1), 6–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/17450918.2020.1829020

Darragi, R. (2007). The Tunisian stage: Shakespeare's part in question. *Critical Survey*, 19(3). https://doi.org/10.3167/cs.2007.190306

Dean, L. F. (Ed.). (1972). *Shakespeare: Modern essays in criticism* (Rev. ed., reprint). Oxford Univ. Press.

Dobson, M., Wells, S., Sharpe, W., & Sullivan, E. (Eds.). (2015). *The oxford companion to Shakespeare* (Second edition). Oxford University Press.

Everett, B. (1982). 'Spanish' Othello: The making of Shakespeare's moor. In S. Wells (Ed.), *Shakespeare Survey* (1st ed., pp. 101–112). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521247527.010

"Fanon, Frantz Omar ." *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, 6th ed. . Retrieved March 28, 2022 from Encyclopedia.com: https://www.encyclopedia.com/reference/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/fanon-frantz-omar

Giraldi, G. (1566). De Gli Hecatommithi Di M. Giovanbattista Giraldi Cinthio Nobile Ferrarese: 1. (n.p.): Scotto.

Greenblatt, S. (2005). *Renaissance self-fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. University of Chicago Press.

Ghazoul, F. J. (1998). The arabization of Othello. *Comparative Literature*, 50(1), 1-31. https://doi.org/10.2307/1771217

Habib, I. H. (2000). *Shakespeare and race: Postcolonial praxis in the early modern period*. University Press of America.

Heilman, R. B. (1972). "Wit and witchcraft: An approach to Othello". In *Modern Essay in Criticism*. Oxford University Press.

Hiddleston, J. (2017). *Writing after postcolonialism: Francophone North African literature in transition*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Ibn Warraq. (2007). *Defending the west: A critique of Edward Said's orientalism*. Prometheus Books.

Loomba, A. (2002). *Shakespeare, race, and colonialism*. Oxford University Press.

---------------. (2005). *Colonialism/postcolonialism* (2nd ed). Routledge.

MacCrossan, C. (2020). "What, in a town of war … to manage private and domestic quarrel? ": Othello and the tragedy of Cyprus. *Shakespeare*, *16*(3), 239–257. https://doi.org/10.1080/17450918.2020.1792538

Morris, R. C., & Spivak, G. C. (Eds.). (2010). *Can the subaltern speak? Reflections on the history of an idea*. Columbia University Press.

Said, E. W. (2003). *Orientalism* (Facsimile edition). Penguin.

Salgado, F. and Salgado, G. (1989). *Shakespeare: Othello*. Penguin.

Singh, J. G. (1996). *Colonial narratives/cultural dialogues: Discoveries of India in the language of colonialism*. Routledge.

---------------. (2019). *Shakespeare and postcolonial theory*. The Arden Shakespeare.

Singh, J. G. & John Wiley & Sons, Inc (Eds.). (2021). *A companion to the global Renaissance: English literature and culture in the era of expansion* (Second edition). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Spence, L. (2010). *Legends and Romances of Spain (1920)*. Kessinger Publishing

Spurgeon, C. F. E. (2001). *Shakespeare's imagery and what it tells us* (Reprinted). Cambridge Univ. Press.

Thieme, J. (2002). *Postcolonial con-texts: Writing back to the canon.* Continuum International Pub. Group. http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=436961

Wells, S. (Ed.). (1982). *Shakespeare survey* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521247527