

*The Other in Othello: Backsliding and Re-turning Turk of the Moor**

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Abstract

Othello is mostly analyzed as the representative of the colonized black people by some scholars. For instance, Stephen Greenblatt in chapter ‘the improvisation of power’ of his work, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, depicts Iago as the colonizer and Othello as the colonized. Iago emphasizes on Othello’s physical differences and his manipulation leads Othello towards his own fall but Iago does not necessarily colonize him. Othello is a skilled commander who, in urgency, is trusted by Venice and they rely on his leadership to save Cyprus from the Turks. Othello is not Venetian and more importantly he is circumcised. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries English and other European pirates and merchants were “turning Turk” to benefit from the profitable life in the Mediterranean coasts of Levant and North Africa. Othello can be seen as a counter example of those Europeans who deserted their homelands to enjoy advantages of belonging to a Muslim society. In this essay I argue reasons of fear and urgency, in the play, based upon historical facts of the period when *Othello* was written. England and Ottomans were in psychological cold war at the time of the composition of *Othello*, a situation where England was not strong enough to imagine a fulfilled conquest of the Ottomans due to the military might of the latter. All these find their voices in *Othello*. As a Muslim who became Christian, I also argue Othello’s turning Turk and his connection and relation with the Turks. Othello might be seen as a counter example to renegades

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(Christians turned Turk) who sought financial advantages of an Islamic life.

Keywords: *Turn Turk, Ottoman Empire, Feminization, Janissary, Privateering, Circumcision, Orientalism, the Other*

Othello'da öteki: Mağripli Türklerin Dönüşü ve Dinden Uzaklaşması

Öz

Othello genelde, bazı bilim adamları tarafından sömürgeleştirilmiş siyahi insanların bir temsili olarak analiz edilir. Örneğin, Stephen Greenblatt'ın çalışmalarının 'gücünün doğaçlaması' bölümünde, Rönesans'ta kendini biçimlendirme, Iago'yu kolonileştirici ve Othello'yu sömürgeleştiren olarak tasvir ediyor. Iago, Othello'nun fiziksel farklılıklarına vurgu yapar ve manipülasyonu Othello'yu kendi düşüşüne doğru yönlendirir, ancak Iago onu tam olarak kolonileştirmez. Othello Kıbrıs'ı ivedilikle Türklerden kurtarmak için Venedik tarafından liderliğine güvenilen yetenekli bir komutandır. Othello Venedikli değildir ve daha da önemlisi sünnetlidir. On altıncı ve on yedinci yüzyılın sonlarında İngiliz ve diğer Avrupalı korsanlar ve tüccarlar Levant ve Kuzey Afrika'nın Akdeniz kıyılarındaki karlı yaşamdan faydalanmak için "Türk'ü dönüştürüyorlardı". Othello, Müslüman bir topluma ait olmanın avantajlarından yararlanmak için anavatanlarını terk eden Avrupalıların karşı bir örneği olarak görülebilir. Bu makalede, oyunda, Othello'nun yazıldığı dönemin tarihsel gerçeklerine dayanarak korku ve aciliyet nedenlerini tartışıyorum. İngiltere ve Osmanlılar, İngiltere'nin Osmanlıların askeri gücü nedeniyle yerine getirilmiş bir fetih hayal edebilecek kadar güçlü olmadığı Othello'nun derlemesi sırasında psikolojik soğuk savaştıydı. Bütün bunlar seslerini Othello'da bulur. Hıristiyan olan bir Müslüman olarak Othello'nun Türk'ü ve Türklerle olan bağlantısını ve ilişkisini değiştirdiğini de tartışıyorum. Othello, İslami bir yaşamın mali avantajlarını arayan dininden dönen kimselere (Hıristiyanlar Türk'ü dönüştürdü) bir karşı örnek olarak görülebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Türkü Dönüştürmek, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Feminizasyon, Yeniçeri, Korsanlık, Sünnet, Oryantalizm, Öteki*

Introduction

Othello (The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice) is a tragedy by William Shakespeare, written in 1603-4. It is an adaptation of “Un Capitano Moro” (“A Moorish Captain”) by Italian author Cinthio (Giovanni Battista Giraldi). Shakespeare may have consulted *Geographical Historie of Africa* by Leo Africanus while composing *Othello*. Records show that the play was first performed on “Hallamas Day, being the first of Nouember ... the Kings maiesties players” performed “A Play in the Banketinghouse at Whit Hall Called the Moor of Venice”. The play entered Stationers’ Register of the Stationers’ Company on October 1621. It was first published in quarto format by Thomas Walkley in 1622. One year later, the play was included in the First Folio of Shakespeare’s collected plays.

Othello is about a noble Moor in Venice. He has faithfully served the state and is well-known for his bravery. Although Othello is accepted as a soldier, he was not received as a legitimate groom upon marrying Desdemona. After Othello is assigned to defend Cyprus against the Ottomans, Iago reveals in a soliloquy that he will frame Cassio and Desdemona as lovers to betray Othello’s trust and to make him jealous. It is not totally clear what his motivations are but through Iago’s machinations, Othello becomes so consumed by jealousy that he accuses Desdemona of adultery, and smothers his “soul’s joy” (2.1.184), then he terminates himself as he did a circumcised Turk in Aleppo.

In this essay, I will argue that at the time of the composition of the play, England was anxiously concerned with Ottoman expansion in Europe; neither was she strong enough to imagine a fulfilled conquest over the Ottomans due to the military might of this rival power. All these find their voices in *Othello*. The essay will also discuss Othello’s connection and relation with the Turks. He is also a counter Janissary instance in this play. As a circumcised Moor who is baptized and converted to Christianity, Othello recalls a fact of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries when English and other European pirates were “turning Turk” to benefit from the profitable privateering life in the Mediterranean coasts of Levant and North Africa. Othello might be seen as a counter example to renegades (Christians turned Turk) who sought the financial advantages of

Islamic life. This essay will also argue that Shakespeare's representation of Othello reveals Britain's preoccupation with fear of the strong power of the Ottoman Empire. It will explore how the play ascribes the same characteristics to Turks as the colonizer does to the colonized, despite the fact that the Ottomans were not colonized: jealous, backward, primitive and all in all driven by instinct rather than the intellect. *Othello* best projects inferiority on to the Turks at the time of the Ottoman's military might. This, arguably, reveals England's anxiety of a terrifying potential conquest by the Ottomans and simultaneously anticipates her vision of colonizing the East as represented by the Ottomans in the context of the play. This anxiety was exacerbated as the English feared they would be forced to denounce their Christian faith if conquered by the Turks who were Muslims. In this light, Othello, although, seen as an inferior North African man, represents the Ottomans.

Edward Said in his highly quoted book *Orientalism* (1978) demonstrates how the East is falsely represented by the West or the Occident as irrational, inferior and uncultured, and how the West represent themselves as superior, cultivated, cultured, rational and democratic. He also contends how the English give a false representation of a colonized country by depicting it as irrational, sensual, idiot, and incapable (Said, 1993, p. 56). Orientalist discourse contributes to the subjugation of the East, so that any Orientalist statement generates "the radically real," to use Said's terms, or is accepted as a statement of the truth (Said, 1978, p. 72). Put simply, Orientalism reveals the ways through which power works through knowledge. It is a process by which the West claims to know the East in order to exert and extend power over the Orient. Actually, the West creates a "radical realism," as Said observes, which is "more real" than any oriental reality (Said, 1978, p. 72). In other words, Orientalist texts construct the East – their culture, life, and identity – in a way that even Orientals themselves have not experienced (Said, 1993, p. 104). As Said argues, "the term Orient is made up of human effort to affirm or identify the Other" (Said, 1978, p. xii). Said, in his work *Orientalism*, draws attention to the fact that the Orient is a European invention and that since antiquity it has been a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and remarkable experiences. He mentions that Orientalism began systematically during the eighteenth

century as a field of study, and Western scholars who studied the Orient and its people were called Orientalists. Furthermore, the Orient helped to define Europe as its contrasting image, idea, personality and experience. Moreover, he argues that Orientalism is a Western way of restructuring the Orient to dominate and gain control over it (Said, 1978, pp. 1-4). As he puts it, “[t]he relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” (Said, 1978, p.5). Said holds that European writings about the Orient produce a dichotomy between the East and the West. This dichotomy is crucial to the creation of European culture and self-conception. If the Orient is depicted as irrational, barbaric, lazy and sensual, then the Occident is rational, civilized hard working people who have their sexual desires under control.

A political version of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, ‘us’) and the strange (the Orient, the East, ‘them’) When one uses categories like Oriental and Western as both the starting and the endpoints of analysis, research, public policy ... the result is usually to polarize the distinction – the Oriental becomes more Oriental, the Westerner more Western – and limit the human encounter between different cultures, traditions, and societies. (Said, 1978, p.45-6)

Said’s contrast in *Orientalism* is that he positions West as the superior who has always had the upper hand. However, some major incidents of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century show a different reality. In that era, England had no territory outside the British Isles, and Elizabethan England never enjoyed the upper hand, let alone visions of dominating Easterners/Muslims (Burton, 2005, p. 57). In fact, Queen Elizabeth in a letter to Sultan Murad III wrote about benefits of good relations between the East and the West (Burton, 2005, p. 18). Despite the difference and separation between Muslims and Christians, Queen Elizabeth was the first English monarch to have an open relationship with Turks and Moors. Eager to find markets for her merchants, she allowed her subjects to trade with Muslims (Matar, 1999, p. 19). Englishmen travelling to Ottoman territories were latecomers and merely strangers to the global trade market. Queen Elizabeth leased the Levant company in 1581, when all her European opponents had already established themselves in Levantine and North African commerce (Danson, 2002, p. 1). Elizabeth knew about their bad

economic situation and struggles, and for that reason, by trying to make friendship with Muslims, she wanted to provide a market for her subjects. During her reign, Englishmen entered vast commercial, diplomatic and social relations with the Turks and the Moors under Ottoman dominion (Matar, 1999, p. 3). Queen Elizabeth was also seeking alliance with the Turks and the Arabs of Levantine and North Africa against their enemy, Spain. None of these facts are taken into Said's account as his focus is dominantly on the discourse of Orientalism from the eighteenth century onwards. Therefore, I suggest and argue that a main cause of the West's representation of Turks during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was not what Said debated as their sense of superiority neither what Loomba discusses as English vision of future domination but their fear and anxieties of turning Turk or going native of the captives, that is, conversion of their religion by adopting Islam and their language and culture.

After several hundred years of jihad and crusade, the lands around the Mediterranean were fairly divided between Muslims and Christians; however, this balance was altered and the borders were changed because of the Ottoman expansion from the East (Konstam, 2016, p. 6). During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Ottoman Empire was known as the most powerful military force in Europe. In the fifteenth century, the Ottoman Empire, formed by Turkish tribes in Anatolia (Asia Minor), began as a minor municipality in what is now Turkey, then extended its territories through Asia Minor and the Balkans (Loomba, 1998, p. 8) to become the most powerful state in the world during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This expansion reached "most of the southeastern Europe to the gates of Vienna, including present-day Hungary, the Balkan region, Greece, and parts of Ukraine; portions of the Middle East now occupied by Iraq, Syria, Israel, and Egypt; North Africa as far west as Algeria; and large parts of the Arabian Peninsula" (*Encyclopædia Britannica*). Gulay Klady-Nagy gives a detailed account of the unrivalled military and economic might of the Ottoman Empire in "The First Centuries of the Ottoman Military Organization" (1977) where from 1525 the income would allow them "to produce 22 to 23 thousand armed men" (Klady-Nagy, 1997, p. 162) and around 1543 a decree was issued that non-Muslim children should be collected to be educated in the military to make up for the loss of soldiers (Klady-Nagy, 1997, p. 19).

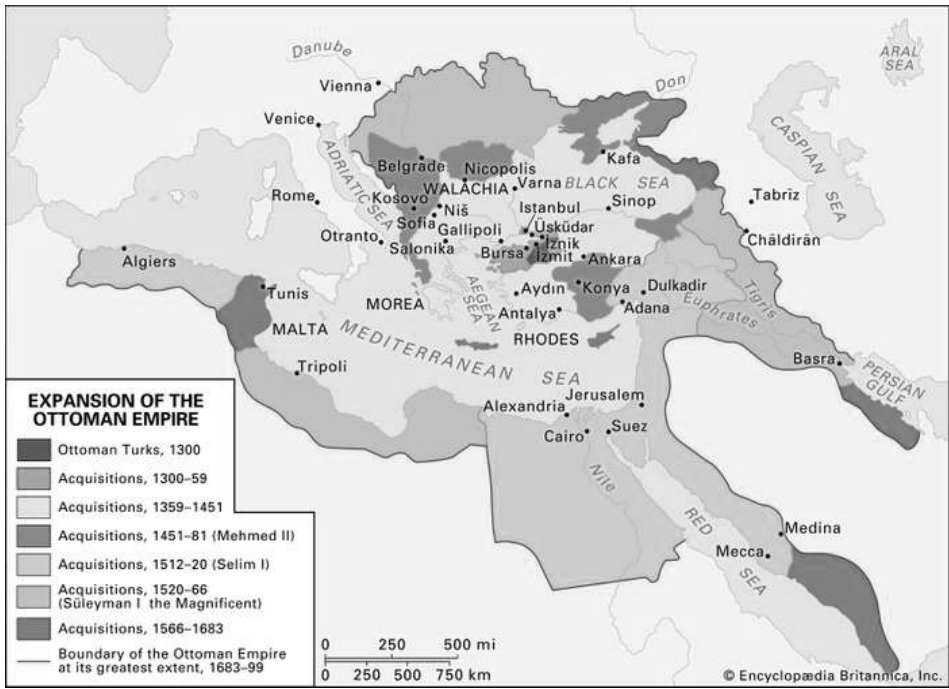


Figure 1: Expansion of the Ottoman Empire. Source: *Encyclopædia Britannica*

The Ottomans were practicing Islam and considered themselves as warriors who fought against the Christian Byzantine state which was on decline. The fall of the Byzantine Empire, following the capture of Constantinople in 1453 by the Ottomans continued retrieving Christian forces in the Balkans and Eastern Mediterranean. The Turkish Sultan Bayezid II (1481–1512) emphasized Turkish language and Muslim traditions. He also encouraged privateers to establish themselves in the Barbary coasts to support the Iberian Moors from invasion of the Spanish vessels. One of these privateers was Kemal Reis, a Turkish captain, who was governing privateers on a Greek Island. He later on moved to North Africa and from there led raids on Malaga and Balearic Islands. For the Berber states (an ethnicity indigenous to North Africa), Ottoman support came at a price. Within a few decades, the Ottomans established their own rulers in the North Barbary coasts who were allied with the Sultan (Ottoman ruler). It was under their leadership that the Berber states became powerful in the

side of the Christian powers of southern Europe (Konstam, 2016, p. 11). By the end of the sixteenth century, all the Berber states (except for Morocco) succumbed to Ottoman control. Their rulers were either commanders of privateering fleets or of the janissaries; and Turkish soldiers were settled in each regency to protect the state and the ruler (Konstam, 2016, p. 24).

Othello is mostly analyzed as the representative of the colonized black people by some scholars. For instance, Stephen Greenblatt in essay “The Improvisation of Power” of his work, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, argues that Iago represents the colonizer and Othello the colonized. Greenblatt shows how Iago improvises over Othello by playing on his quick judgement and temper. In the play, Iago and other characters display their racial prejudice against Othello by referring to physical traits such his thick lips, his dark skin and his strong sexual desire. He is depicted as a savage brought to civilization. Conversely, I think that Othello, more than representing the “inferior black,” stands for a superpower of that time which cannot be overcome and whose expansionism cannot be restricted and contained even via deceit.

Loomba, however, in her book *Shakespeare, Race and Colonialism* argues that Othello can be seen as both “lascivious Moor” and “turbaned Turk”. She says that he is the victim of “racial beliefs”. She also states that Iago’s machinations work on Othello only because he knows that marrying a young fair Venetian woman is “unnatural”. Loomba thinks that nowadays Othello’s Moorishness is underplayed because there is more focus on his Islamic background; as a result, it is difficult to tell whether he is doomed because he is a “circumcised dog” or because he has a “sooty bosom”. Loomba depicts Othello as a counter Janissary instance too. Thus, while he is a baptized Christian, he embodies the threat of Islam as well. With respect to Loomba’s argument, I would like to mention that Othello’s representation is merely what the English society would want to imagine for both Easterners as well as those Europeans who turned Turk and adopted the Eastern lifestyle. These fate and features attributed to Othello are not, however, the reality of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries with reference to the historical facts.

Argument

As a Turk turned Christian, Othello can be seen as a counter example to those Europeans who converted to Islam. During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries many Europeans converted to Islam for different reasons. Turgut (or Dragut) Reis was a Greek slave who converted to Islam and joined the Ottoman army as a gunner (Konstam, 2016, p. 46). Murad Reis is another instance of a converted European. He was a Dutch privateer called Jan Janszoon. After conversion he settled in North Africa and continued his career as a pirate (Konstam, 2016, p. 49). These men are just a few examples of hundreds or perhaps even thousands of converted Europeans who settled in Muslim soils. Many captured European seamen accepted Islam to avoid slavery and therefore they could serve Muslims (Konstam, 2016, p.49). Moreover, many merchants did so to profit from Muslim society, but in return very few Muslims deserted their religion. this study debates that Said's argument fails to explain England and the Ottomans' confrontation before the rise of the former as a colonizing power and therefore it does not hold validity to *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, since during that time England was not yet a colonizer. Their concern with the Ottoman Empire, which was the strongest military and economic power in the world, was due to the potential fear of being conquered by the latter. This research will argue that *Othello* expresses the West's fear of the Ottomans and for the "turning Turk" of some of their citizens who converted to Islam and lived in the lands conquered by the Ottomans. However, this act of "turning Turk" became synonymous with a betrayal in the discourse of the English. Moreover, Othello represents the Ottoman Empire and is therefore perceived as a threat to England. More significantly, this study will argue that Edward Said's contention that the East is always inferior and irrational cannot explain the intricate mechanism of power relations between the West and the East as implicit in Shakespeare's plays. In other words, Said's argument fails to address and explain the Occident's encounter with the Orient prior to the rise of Britain as a colonial power.

Othello is a rare instance of a Muslim born person who became Christian. In fact, Othman, Ottoman and Othello all sound alike and suggest a thematic connection. There are plenty of textual references in the play to the Turks

such as: “[A] Turkish fleet” (1.3.8) that is preparing for Cyprus” which warns us that a skillful Turkish Armada is threatening Cyprus (1.3.27). To react to his daughter’s elopement with Othello, Brabantio sarcastically states: “So let the Turk of Cyprus us beguile; We lose it not, so long as we can smile” (1.3.210-11). In defense of his statement to Desdemona, Iago answers: “it is true, or else I am a Turk” (2.1.114). Othello gives news to people that “wars are done, the Turks are drown’d” (2.1.202), apparently the threat is temporarily gone. Traditionally the play is analyzed within a colonial context where Iago is the colonizer and Othello is the colonized; but then why are there frequent references to the term Turk? Despite all the attempts to explain Othello within a colonial context, at the time the play was written Europeans were in no place to claim superiority.

Historical Analysis of the Play

In the age of explorations while Spanish, Portuguese and English ships sailed to the New World for exploration and conquest of new lands, the Ottoman Turks were rapidly conquering European territory. Even the English felt the power of the Turkish threat as the Turks reached gates of Vienna although it was far away from their land, and almost one third of the known world was ruled by the Ottoman sultan. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, Europeans were involved in the African slave trade, while Turkish privateers active in the Mediterranean and the Northeastern Atlantic were enslaving English men, women and children (Vitkus, 2003, p. 78). This crisis led English authors to demonize the Turks not from a cultural domination perspective, but from the terror of being conquered, captured and converted (Vitkus, 2003, p. 78). Why did the threat of the Ottoman Empire cause such anxiety for Christians? After the conquest of Constantinople by Sultan Mehmed II in 1453, Christians throughout Europe sensed the terror caused by the mighty Ottoman Empire. Even though the Ottomans were far away from English soil, authors like Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe paid special attention to the Ottoman threat over Christian Europeans, English identity and English lands in their works. Thomas Newton, an English clergyman, wrote in 1575 that Turks were once “very far from our clime and region, and therefore the less to be feared, but now they are even at our doors and ready to come into our houses” (Newton, 1575, cited in Tinniswood, 2010, p. 5-6). Thus, in the

sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the English were in a paradoxical status, while nurturing the vision of colonizing the world, they themselves feared being colonized by the Turks.

The Ottoman Empire was both threatening and fascinating, which caused the authorities and religious leaders' distress and concern. For the English state, however, the Ottoman Empire was both concerning and profitable to trade with and less fearsome than their Catholic enemy, Spain. As the Anglo-Islamic relationship grew stronger during the Elizabethan period, the English became increasingly fascinated by Islamic culture. Simultaneously they were very much concerned with the power of Islamic Imperialism to convert Christians into Turks (Vitkus, 2003, pp. 78-9). These encounters with Muslims occurred with merchants, refugees, pirates and ambassadors. Numerous English travelers wandered in Muslim lands and described the customs, history and religion of Islam in detail, whereas no Muslim seems to have ventured into English lands (Matar, 1999, p. 39). Muslims at the same time were culturally, economically and historically rich, so perhaps Christians and their culture were of no interest for them. In addition, the holy land was under Ottoman dominion and its ports were international trading centers. Due to the Muslim dominance in the Levant and North Africa, the English who went or were taken there had no choice but to submit to Islamic law and adapt to Islamic culture, eat Islamic food, dress in Islamic fashion and learn Turkish or Arabic languages to be able to communicate and trade with Muslim merchants. The same story applied to the captives who were working in Muslim households where cultural adaptation was inevitable, and as a result many of them turned Turk/Muslim. As a consequence, nothing guaranteed that English culture and identity were safe from any risk of changing.

The figure of Othello is also an instance of a counter-Janissary, or a counter example to Christians who turned Turk. A janissary was an elite infantry unit that formed the sultan's guard(s) and household troops. Infants were taken from Christian families in the Balkans, then circumcised and converted. The janissary corps was the nucleus of the Ottoman army. They were converted to Islam and recruited in childhood. This hierarchical warrior class played a vital social and political role for the Ottoman outposts on

the Barbary Coasts as well. Janissaries served as the main fighting force aboard all corsair (privateer) vessels (Tinniswood, 2010, pp. 25-8). In the Ottoman armies, the Janissaries were regarded as highly disciplined elite infantry. They also were very loyal to the sultan. Janissaries were also sent to North Africa with other troops to conquer the Berber states in the name of sultan (Konstam, 2016, p. 52).

In the play, Othello's story is an example of a counter janissary case. He talks "[O]f being taken by the insolent foe, [A]nd sold to slavery" he then mentions that he bought his freedom (1.3.137-38). Putting their faith in him as a Moor converted to Christianity, he has become the only noble general on whom the Venetian authority relies to save the island from the raid of the Ottomans. The janissary corps was Christian born, then converted to Islam and circumcised; on the contrary, Othello was a circumcised Muslim-born who then was baptized and converted to Christianity. Despite his difference, Othello is accepted into and trusted by the Venetian government. However, the narrative still associates a devilish savageness with him. This dark barbarity is shown as hidden and an innate trait rather than a cultural construction or acquisition. It is portrayed as an essential part of his nature which cannot be resolved or changed. Iago insinuates his tricks on Othello throughout the play and succeeds to awaken that "evil" within him. Othello firstly loses his refined language (4.2.39); he insults Desdemona and beats her because he cannot control his anger. These are some of the given evidences in the play which prove the unchangeable nature of Othello. He later on proves not to be a reliable force – as a former Muslim – to take responsibility of a Crusade against the Ottomans, "the general enemy" (1.3.49).

The fear of the Grand Turk and the threat of "turning Turk" has deeply affected the shaping of European culture. The Turks came to be synonymous with the Devil, who according to Christianity, wanted to convert good Christian souls. The Turks' desire to do so was interpreted and depicted in England as sexual/sensual temptation of virtue, accompanied by a wrathful obsession with power which would damn their pure Christian souls (Vitkus, 2003, p. 77). The Christian authorities including monarchs and the pope were concerned about the Ottoman military power; that

is why the priests often added a prayer to their sermons in which they condemned the renegades and damned Ottoman power and wished its destruction (Vitkus, 2003, p. 83). The pope also worked hard to unite the Christian authorities and arrange a crusade against their general enemy, the Ottomans; but not all the Christian monarchs agreed with a crusade because of their economic ties to the Turks. For instance: Queen Elizabeth sympathized with Turks and sought economic as well as military alliance (against Spain) with them. However, later on King James I signed the treaty of London on 1604 in which the nineteen-year Anglo-Spanish war was concluded on peace terms. The conversion of a few hundred Christians to Muslims might not seem dangerous for society; this, however, can be seen as a serious peril by the church and the monarch.

The terror of the Ottoman military threat is introduced at the beginning of the play. In the middle of the night, the duke of Venice gathers with the senators to discuss an important matter. They have received multiple reports regarding the Ottoman's invasion of Cyprus. The Venetian authority is concerned about Cyprus because it is not well protected, and the mighty Ottoman Empire prepares to invade the island. They know the importance of the island to the Ottomans and they are also aware of how strong and well-equipped the Turkish armada is. The Mediterranean islands like Rhodes and Cyprus are important for both the Muslims and the Christians because they are located on important trading routes. The Venetian authority fully trusts Othello to the extent that they put the responsibility of protecting and guarding their Christian lands in the hands of a Moor turned Christian. As they summon him in the middle of the night, the duke receives Othello and says "[V]aliant Othello, we must straight employ you / Against the general enemy Ottomans" (1.3.48-49). Othello heads with his forces to Cyprus but just before they arrive to Cyprus, a tempest shipwrecks the Ottoman fleet. In Act 2 Scene 1, news comes informing the Cypriots of the Turkish Armada. A gentleman announces:

News, lads! Our wars are done.
The desperate tempest hath so bang'd the Turks,
That their designment halts. A noble ship of Venice
Hath seen a grievous wreck and sufferance
On most part of their fleet. (2.1.20-23)

After the tempest Othello announces that “our wars are done, the Turks are drown’d” (2.1.202). At the feast which is held to celebrate the full destruction of the Turkish fleet, the herald praises Othello saying “[H]eaven bless the isle of Cyprus and our noble general Othello” (2.3.12). But are they truly drowned? Is the danger gone for real? While the Turks are kept out of the play by a tempest, their threat is still felt at the edges and most specifically at the beginning of the play. For example, Iago causes a fight between Cassio and Montano which is interpreted as Turkish behavior. Also, the “noble Moor”, Othello, who bets his life upon Desdemona’s faithfulness and calls her his “soul’s joy” (2.1.184), by murdering his Venetian wife eventually turns into the threat from within. Therefore, even though Ottoman’s military threat disappears after the tempest, the Turkish threat continues to exist in the form of Othello. By falling into Iago’s trap, Othello turns into an unstable person who commits homicide and suicide. Othello might be seen as a converted soldier (a Muslim converted to Christianity) serving the Christian state, but jealousy and savageness are viewed and depicted as the innate characteristics which tie him to the Turks and Islam eternally. In a time of emotional crisis, he allows his one-sided judgment to take over him. The thought of Desdemona having an affair with a white man younger than him drives Othello jealous, blinds his logic and makes him decide hastily based upon his wrath and fury.

The storm that prevents the Turkish fleet from invading Cyprus is the fictional version of the storms which protected England from Spanish armadas in 1588 and 1596-98 (Vitkus, 2003, p. 96). This invasion of the Ottoman armada (the Muslims) into Cyprus recalls the Catholic threat posed by Spanish armada against Protestant England. In this instance, Cyprus seems to be likened to and self-identified as England, and the Turkish Armada to the Spanish one by Shakespeare. Cyprus is not well protected, neither is England. Earlier in history England along with English identity and religion was saved when the Spanish armada was shipwrecked in a tempest. However, in the early seventeenth century the Ottoman Empire was expanding its territories into the heart of Europe more than ever, which brought fear into every Christian house. Thus, by likening the siege of Cyprus to the failure of the Spanish Armada during the siege of England, *Othello* indirectly expresses England’s fear of the Ottomans and their hope

for another divine force to make the “unbelievers” retreat from Christian lands. However, in reality, the Turkish armada, in the fourth Ottoman-Venetian war, took over Cyprus in 1571, which is around 30 years before Shakespeare wrote the play. Shakespeare most certainly knew about this invasion of Cyprus, and the English audience knew that Cyprus was now an Ottoman dominion too. The fact that Shakespeare tries to re-create the Cyprus invasion by likening it to the Spanish Armada might mean that he is concerned about the Turks’ victory over Christendom, and is wishing they would be vanquished by a tempest.

While *Othello* does not have a single Turkish character, as even the opening act of the play shows, Turks and the term ‘turning Turk’ have a special resonance in the play. As Othello in reaction to the quarrel between Montano and Cassio says: “Are we turn’d Turks, and to ourselves do that / Which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites?” (2.3.170-71). To turn Turk was to commit an act of betrayal (Burton, 2005, p.11). Burton declares the idiom “turn Turk” entered the English lexicon in the early sixteenth century when English Christians abandoned their land to pursue great fortunes in the Islamic territories (Burton, 2005, p.16). Conversion to Islam was considered a kind of sexual transgression or spiritual whoredom, and Protestantism proclaimed the same judgement – eternal damnation – for all those who were seduced by the Prophet Mohammad. *Othello* draws attention to English anxieties about Ottoman aggression in the form of moral, sexual and religious confusion. Such fear of sexual instability is linked to racial and cultural anxieties about turning Turk as they faced the expansion of the Ottoman Empire (Vitkus, 2003, p. 78). The English had the most contact with the Muslim Turks through the Ottoman Empire. Numerous Christians were converting for a variety of reasons, but the opposite rarely happened; that is why a Christian who deserts his religion was called a renegade or treacherous. Othello is a counter example of a renegade; thus, baptismal water is supposed to wash his soul white and to take the devil out of him. However, Iago’s plotting proves that the devil or savageness inside Othello was only suppressed and a provocative plan was needed to wake up the beast inside of him. Even those Muslim Turks who have converted to Christianity are unreliable as they are eternally prone to bestiality due to their savage nature.

Since the Barbary pirates caused the conversion of many Englishmen, they were the key players in shaping the relationship between Islam and Christendom in the seventeenth century (Tinniswood, 2010, p. 2). After England succeeded in signing trade agreements with African principalities and the Ottoman Sultanate, English merchant ships sailed more frequently in the Mediterranean where they encountered Muslim pirates. *Othello* was written when the English were trading in Muslim cities such as Constantinople, Aleppo, Alexandretta, Tunis, Tripoli and Algiers more than ever. At the same time, the threat of Muslim pirates in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic was rising and in the early seventeenth century Turkish pirates from North Africa began raiding the English coasts. English captives of Muslim pirates were sold into slavery or kept for ransom. Having faced the problem of Christian captives turning Turk in order to gain their freedom, the English authorities decided to prevent conversion by using sermons to condemn the practice of conversion to Islam. This anxiety about conversion brought up a discourse about renegades, which applied to those who turned Turk. The Ottoman sultans were associated with Satan or the Antichrist. However, despite all the warnings from religious leaders, many converted to Islam for economic reasons or to avoid martyrdom. Still others may have converted because they were attracted to Islamic culture and its message (Vitkus, 2003, pp. 82-3).

The famous Captain Ward is an example of a pirate who became Muslim to enjoy a prosperous life on the Barbary coasts of North Africa (Tinniswood, 2010, p. 14). The Ottoman and Barbary ports in the Mediterranean were becoming more popular amongst Christian countries as well as England for being profitable. An English pirate, half-man, half-legend, named John Ward was the arch-pirate, the corsair king of popular folk culture. He had been wreaking havoc in the Mediterranean for several years and had settled in Tunis and made a profitable partnership with the Muslim ruler there Tinniswood (2010, p. 14-15). In spite of this, Robert Daborne's play called *A Christian Turned Turk* (1612), which is inspired by the life of Captain Ward, condemns his act of conversion by depicting his death and damnation. However, Ward lived a wealthy life and died in 1622, ten years after the play was written.

To turn Turk became such a popular term in the English language that most people used it to express an act of treason. So turning Turk was considered the ultimate betrayal – as far as the English were concerned – even worse than robbery or murder (Tinniswood, 2010, p. 43). Anger and horror were the normal response to news of an Englishman committing such treachery as turning Turk (Tinniswood, 2010, p. 45). This attitude towards conversion and turning Turk is best manifest at the celebration following Othello's victory. Iago persuades Cassio to drink more to make him drunk because he was planning to get rid of Cassio. He deceives Cassio and causes his dismissal as he firmly believes he himself deserved to be the lieutenant instead of Cassio. As soon as Othello learns about the quarrel between drunk Cassio and Montano, he shockingly says “from whence ariseth this? / Are we turn'd Turks, and to ourselves do that / Which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites?” (2.3.169-170). Have we become traitors to kill one another, he exclaims? The Lord has punished the Ottomites by drowning them, he continues, and demands everyone to stop the barbarian brawl (2.3.171). Here, and throughout the play, violence, treachery and chaos are shown as traits attributed to the Turks or to Islam by Othello and he reminds the people of the threat of the Ottomans, commanding them to behave like a civilized society. Despite Othello's Moorishness and Oriental past, these remarks imply that he is civilized enough to be accepted into Venetian society. How far is he accepted by them? Is he accepted as a Venetian or as the Other?

Shakespeare depicts Othello as a successful man who has converted and whose blackness and savageness have been washed out of him through baptism. He also shows the biased attitude of the society to Othello's race and religion. For instance, Iago provokes Brabantio by referring to Othello's “sooty bosom” and his animal lust (like a Barbary horse or old ram) which are not taken seriously by the duke. On the contrary, he regards Othello as someone fairer than black. We cannot know for sure whether the Duke states this because of the love and respect he has for Othello or because the state obviously needs Othello to deal with the horrific Turks. So, the Duke might be truthful in regard to Othello, or might only be trying to calm the tension. Perhaps if it was the Duke's daughter who eloped with Othello the situation would have been dealt with differently. Othello

cannot yet become fully Venetian; he was not born in Venice nor was his religion Christianity by birth. Even though he has converted to Christianity his religious history is unavoidable. The implication of “witchcraft” before the ducal court is associated with him by Brabantio, suggesting a religious emphasis; he is the Muslim Other (1.3.64). At the time when *Othello* was written, the English preferred to use the general name “Turk” for all Muslims. It may be a bit challenging to look at Othello as a “circumcised dog” (a Turk) or a dark-skinned Moor (“sooty bosom”). This “lascivious Moor” can also be seen as a “turbaned Turk” as he associates himself with one at the end of the play. He explains that he punished a “turban’d Turk” for beating a Venetian, then, he goes on stabbing himself as the punishment of killing the fair Venetian lady (Desdemona) (5.2.351-4). Considering the fact that for Europeans all Turks and Muslims were regarded as morally and physically darker than Christians, he can be seen as both (a dark-skinned Turk) (Loomba, 2002, p. 92); he is essentially the Other.

Iago’s recourse to strong animal imagery and racial differences in informing Brabantio of his daughter’s elopement to arouse his racial prejudices against Othello is telling. When Iago tries to wake Brabantio up in the middle of the night to let him know about his daughter’s elopement with Othello, he shouts “Your heart is burst, you have lost half your soul; ... an old black ram / Is topping your white ewe” (1.1.87-89). In order to enrage Brabantio about this interracial marriage, Iago continues shouting at his door “you’ll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse; you’ll have your nephews neigh to you; you’ll have courses for cousins and gennets for germans” (1.1.110-113). All the terms “black ram,” “white ewe,” “horse,” “neigh” and “gennets” depict this interracial marriage as disgusting and bestial. This is an indication of English authors’ attempts at demonizing interracial marriage with the Muslim Other to their audience.

In Act 1, Othello’s successful marriage to Desdemona can be seen as an act of piracy, stealing Brabantio’s daughter, like pirates who took passengers of the ships as captives. English monarchs issued letters of marque to legalize pirates attacking their opponents (Matar, 1999, p. 56). Thousands of disenchanting and disempowered sailors turned to piracy in the early 1600s. Many were privateers who had the authority to capture

merchant ships belonging to an enemy for profit. They attacked merchant ships but since they had letters of marque from the government which authorized them to attack enemies, they remained on the safe side of the law (Tinniswood, 2010, pp. 15-7). Iago says, “he tonight hath boarded a land carrack; / If it prove lawful prize, he’s made forever” (1.2.50-51). He also calls Othello a “Barbary horse” and analogizes their elopement to an act of piracy (Vitkus, 2003, p. 92). This means that if Venice approves of the act, the law stands on Othello’s side, and thus their elopement would be legal. This approval can be seen as a letter of marque, which legalizes the act of piracy and officializes Othello’s act of privateering as a dark-skinned circumcised man. Othello becomes an example of a privateer who takes a white Christian woman into his household, an unforgivable act, a subversion of the hierarchy which would lead to catastrophe and should be paid for.

On the surface, Othello is accepted as a soldier who is chosen as the commander of the Venetian fleet but is not officially accepted as the son-in-law of Brabantio (a Venetian citizen). Although Montano is the governor of Cyprus, they found Othello a better replacement to Montano: “[T]he Turk with a most mighty preparation makes for Cyprus” (1.3.221-222). To choose Othello for such a high rank and responsibility shows Venice’s regard of him. He is trusted to have the capability to protect the island as he is both a professional commander and is the most knowledgeable of the terrain. However, when it comes to truly embracing him into society as Brabantio’s son-in-law, he becomes the black Other; their elopement becomes “Foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural” (3.3.233). When all these prejudices against the Other are revealed by Brabantio’s reaction to the elopement, Iago notices these racial prejudices against Othello and acts upon them.

Brabantio is shown to be a racist against his – illegitimate – son-in-law and a misogynist against his own daughter. When in Act 1 Scene 3, Brabantio takes his complaints to the duke, he accuses Othello of using witchcraft to corrupt and steal his daughter. He firmly believes that it is impossible for him to win Desdemona’s heart without any spell or medicine, let alone falling “in love with what she fear’d to look on” (1.3.98). Brabantio

highlights Othello's Otherness by relating the practice of witchcraft to him and judging the way he looks. Venetian authority, however, does not see Othello as a dark-skinned ex-slave with an Islamic or Ottoman background. When the duke learns about Othello and Desdemona's elopement, in order to satisfy Brabantio, he says: "[I]f virtue no delighted beauty lack, [Y]our son-in-law is far more fair than black" (1.3.290-291) to remind him of Othello's virtuousness. Despite the Duke's regard for him and his great skill and experiences, Othello cannot be accepted as a son-in-law or relative of a white Venetian family. Othello is depicted as a Moor with a slave past, he has black skin and thick lips as well as great military skills; he acts nobly, but he also has a subliminal tendency to violence at the same time. Although Brabantio tries to prove that his naïve daughter has been deceived (evidence: once again Othello is likened to the deceiving Satan) by Othello with the help of witchcraft, the duke asks him to accept and bless their marriage as a father-in-law. However, he does not.

Moreover, the play associates mystery and exoticism to the East, represented by Othello. Othello is aware of his Otherness and subtly uses his difference to his own advantage. He claims to have won Desdemona's heart with the stories of his life experiences. Every time Brabantio invites him to his house, Othello was asked to speak about his adventures in different countries. Therefore, by telling exotic tales of strange lands with unusual inhabitants Othello takes advantage of his racial difference to his own interest. He is aware of his difference from the rest of the society and by telling extraordinary stories of strange lands, Othello "seduced" Desdemona to fall in love with him. Relatedly, travel documents produced during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries depict bizarre habits attributed to non-Europeans. For instance, in a 1603 German edition of Sir Walter Raleigh's book *Discovery of Guiana* 1595 Native Americans are represented as Blemmyes. Blemmyes are, according to ancient authors, Africans whose heads are in their chests (Early visual presentations of the New World, 2011). This same phenomenon is mentioned in *Othello* where Othello talks about his travels and that he saw men whose heads were growing beneath their shoulders. Othello's observations may be considered to be fictional but paintings of Blemmyes were meant to show observed facts. More importantly, these stories serve to distinguish Othello's difference

from monstrous non-Europeans he has seen in his journeys. Referring to Othello's "thick lips", "sooty bosom" and animal lust (like "an old ram") paint him as inferior and an outsider, yet different from those whose heads grow below their shoulders (Loomba, 1998, p. 60). Othello's mysterious, exotic tales help him appear different from other Africans. He, of course, would want to use his exoticness and dissimilarity from a Venetian for his own interest in order to win Desdemona's heart.



Figure 2: Depiction of Blemmyes, engraving in a 1603 German edition of Sir Walter Raleigh's "Discovery of Guiana," 1595. Source: Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University

Othello, "the Moor of Venice" cannot completely become a part of Venetian society and his exoticness becomes his enemy later in the play. He is different from Desdemona; Iago knows this and acts upon it, which eventually reveals the dark side of Othello. As the play portrays, his jealousy is rooted in the fact that he is different and cannot become a Venetian. Iago plays upon this difference to stimulate his jealousy and to convince Othello that his wife will not love him for long. Othello, at first, appears

to be a wise, patient man with refined language. In the beginning of the play, when Roderigo accompanies Brabantio to show him where Othello is staying with his daughter, Iago tries to scare Othello off by telling him that his father-in-law is coming for him. Othello does not escape like a coward but rather decides to remain and encounter Brabantio respectfully. He modestly tells the troops: “[K]eep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them” (1.2.59). Later when Iago tries to paint Desdemona as an unfaithful wife, Othello starts to change. We can see the transformation in both his manner and language. By Act 4 scene 2, Othello has become a bad-tempered man who uses harsh language. He calls his “once soul’s joy” a strumpet or a whore (4.2.80-5). Although Desdemona is being treated unfairly by her husband, she cannot accept these changes in him because she knows the valiant noble Othello, not the harsh jealous man he has become (Loomba, 2002, p. 96). When in the play Emilia asks if Othello is a jealous man, Desdemona replies ‘Who, he? I think the sun where he was born / Drew all such humours from him’ (3.4.28-30).

As Iago continues to corrupt Othello, he sends Cassio to Desdemona in order to ask for forgiveness from his commander so he can have his title restored. Iago’s purpose is to make Othello believe that his wife is having an affair with Cassio. Iago claims that the reason why Cassio stands away from Othello and instead of talking with Othello holds secret meetings with Desdemona is their secret relationship. Iago makes Othello suspect them and he becomes enraged as he believes “Iago is most honest” (2.3.6). Hence, Iago’s insinuations against Othello eventually reveal a hidden side of him. Even if Othello thinks of his wife as honest, disturbing thoughts and doubts awaken his jealousy. Othello’s behavior out of jealousy – the fact that he easily becomes convinced that Desdemona could prefer Cassio, a white man, over him – is a sign of him acknowledging the racial superiority of Cassio and therefore shows his own inferiority complex. Othello is an example of Frantz Fanon’s concept of *epidermalization*, internalization of inferiority complex. Fanon argues that the colonized develop an inferiority complex mobilized by the colonizer (Fanon, 1967, p. 4). Cultural assimilation, Fanon argues, happens when the native culture of a colonized people is replaced by the culture of the colonial power. Firstly, the culture of colonialism prevents the colonized from developing

an independent sense of identity, which in turn has a negative effect on their psychological development. Secondly, because Western popular culture equates whiteness with purity and goodness, and blackness with impurity and evil, the colonized people learn to equate blackness with evil. As a result, they aspire to be white which has profound psychological repercussions on black people. Sooner or later, they realize that they have no viable identity. Having learned to be black is to be subhuman, they cannot identify as black. At the same time, their aspiration to be white is destined to fail. For a black person can never truly become white. Black individuals experience a shock upon realizing that despite their European education and loyalty in European ideals, white people perceive them to be fundamentally different and inferior. Although Othello is not representing the colonized, a similar concept is ascribed to him, appropriating Fanon's idea. He is well aware of his racial and background difference with the rest of the Venetian society which cause his inferiority complex. Iago's whispering that Desdemona "did deceive her father, marrying you; / And when she seem'd to shake and fear your looks, / She loved them most" enrages him (3.3.206-207). The following quote from Othello shows his misogyny and makes his inferiority complex clear:

Haply, for I am black
And have not those soft parts of conversation
That chamberers have, or for I am declined
Into the vale of years, —yet that's not much—
She's gone. I am abused; and my relief
Must be to loathe her. O curse of marriage,
That we can call these delicate creatures ours,
And not their appetites! I had rather be a toad,
And live upon the vapor of a dungeon,
Than keep a corner in the thing I love
For others' uses. Yet, 'tis the plague of great ones;
Prerogated are they less than the base;
'Tis destiny unshunnable, like death:
Even then this forkèd plague is fated to us
When we do quicken. (3.3.263-77)

Othello points to his racial difference as a cause of Desdemona's disloyalty. His heart is becoming dark and vengeful, he thinks Desdemona who used

to be as pure as the goddess Diana, is now dark and polluted (3.3.386-387). Iago's machinations work on Othello effectively because Othello now knows and believes in woman's inherent duplicity. Othello and Iago are both vivid examples of patriarchal intolerance; Iago hates women and always criticizes them, and now Othello who is suffocated by jealousy and suspicion accuses women of adultery too. Othello who was kind and respectful has now turned into a jealous misogynist; he speaks against marriage, commitment and women. Thus, the conversion that Othello undergoes is revealed. Forasmuch as Othello has an inferiority complex, he might be aware of the fragility of an unnatural marriage between him – an old black soldier – and a young, well-born, white woman.

The thought of Cassio making love to Desdemona causes Othello's epileptic seizure. This seizure happens because of the images Othello has of Cassio sleeping with Desdemona. It is simply his sickness which is triggered by overwhelming stress. Othello's epileptic disease recalls the disease of the prophet (Mohammad) who was reported by Muslims to have mysterious seizures at the moments of inspiration. The seizure is associated with both sacred and satanic inspirations; but Christians of Shakespeare's time maintained that he was rather an epileptic (Vitkus, 2003, p.85).

Othello calls his "black vengeance" to arise "from thy hollow cell" (3.3.446). The vengeful Turkish husband wakes up to take revenge on the unfaithful wife and the disloyal lieutenant. Othello demands Iago to murder Cassio and he, himself, does not rest until he punishes the corrupt Desdemona. He insults his wife by calling her a wanton woman and even strikes her before the attendants from Venice. Acknowledging Othello as a Turk justifies his jealousy, his emotional outbursts and irrationality through his racial difference (Loomba, 1998, p.84). The person that Othello has now turned into can be seen as a variation of the story of the Sultan and the fair Greek woman. This story was found in Richard Knolles' *Generall Historie of The Turkes*, a contemporary history book about the Ottomans that was popular at the time the play was written. The story is an instance of Turko-Islamic cruelty that features an Ottoman Sultan who must choose between his Christian slave lover called Irene or masculinity and honor. The Ottoman emperor kills his Greek lover and Othello similarly kills his

Venetian wife to demonstrate their ability to control over their passions and possessions (Vitkus, 2003, p.99).

We realize that even though Othello seems different from the Other, he ultimately embodies the stereotypical vengeful and violent Turkish husband who murders his Christian wife (Loomba, 2002, pp. 94-5). The effects of Iago's acts on Othello's instinctual forces turns Desdemona from Othello's "soul's joy" to a "fair devil." Iago does not stop until he "turn(s) her virtue into pitch" (2.3.334) in the eyes of Othello. The suspicion that Desdemona cheated on Othello transforms his heart into stone (4.1.175) and his mind is "perplexed in the extreme" (5.2.355), (Vitkus, 2003, pp. 84-5). Love and emotions change place with hatred because he believes his wife has "turned to folly, and she was a whore" (5.2.141). He tells Desdemona "[T]hou art to die" (5.2.56). The savage ruthless "nature" of Othello has taken over him to the extent that even when she begs him to have mercy on her, because "I never did / Offend you in my life; never loved Cassio" (5.2.68-68), he becomes furious. Hard-hearted Othello has become so vengeful that he has no mercy left in him to forgive his wife or even give her one more night to live. Othello, "I that am cruel am yet merciful" (5.2.86), strangles his wife twice to make sure she is completely dead. The jealous Turkish man whom he has turned into wants to have control over his wife and kills her: "Ha! No more moving. / Still as the grave" (5.2.102-3). Yet, he considers himself merciful for not damning her soul by allowing her to pray before death. He now has reverted from a noble Christian to a jealous Turkish Muslim. This act of murder may seem to Othello as just an imitation of divine lordship, but it is rather a cruel act made in wrath and jealousy, Christian deadly sins, hence, ascribing Satanic aspects to Othello. Othello's assumed power over life and death is a sign of his transformation to a "cruel Moor" (5.2.256) or a bloody Turkish sultan who hastily approves of a violent and merciless justice (Vitkus, 2003, pp. 98-9).

After his act of murder is revealed, Othello acknowledges the Turk he has turned into. He knows that by killing Desdemona, his innocent wife who is a Venetian citizen, he has betrayed the state. Emilia testifies to Desdemona's loyalty and then Iago's evil plans became known to everyone.

Lodovico deposes Othello from the titleship of Cyprus and makes Cassio its new governor. Othello has now lost his title as well as his respect and dignity. Othello's tone softens now, as he is regretful for murdering such an innocent delicate creature whom he loved most. Remorseful for all that has happened, he begs to say a word before Lodovico departs:

I have done the state some service, and they know't
No more of that. I pray you, in your letters,
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice, then must you speak
Of one that loved not wisely but too well;
Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought,
Perplex'd in the extreme; of one whose hand,
Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdued eyes,
Albeit unused to the melting mood,
Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees. (5.2.338-347)

Alarmed and embarrassed by what he has become, Othello reminds them and himself of his good services for the state. He asks to be remembered as a dutiful commander rather than a manipulated jealous husband who threw his precious wife away, the wife who was more precious than all his tribe, just like savage Indians who throw pearls away because they do not know their value. Then he carries on persuading the audience of his honorable intentions:

...in Aleppo once,
Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk
Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
I took by the throat the circumcised dog,
And smote him, thus. (5.2.351-354)

At this point, he is addressing the enemy he has become. The only way to repent and to discard the Turk within, for Othello, is to kill himself. Once he realizes the Turk he has become, he tells the story of a turbaned Turk whom he killed in Aleppo for striking a Venetian. Now he is that Turk who has killed a Venetian and then stabs himself in front of the attendants.

Othello punishes himself for offending Venetian society and the sentence for this sinful betrayal is death. This is a quarrel between the respectable Christian self who used to be a successful general and the vengeance jealous Turk self who was awakened by Iago. At last, by killing himself Othello allows his Christian side to triumph over his Turkish side. It also suggests that there is no remedy but death for a Turk as s/he is always and eternally at the mercy of innate instinctual forces.

Conclusion

According to Christian theology, blackness is the sign of damnation and whiteness is the symbol of salvation. The conventional colors associated with salvation and damnation are established by Brabantio in the play when he says “[D]amned as thou art” (1.2.64) to Othello. Othello, by falling into error and sin, proves Brabantio to be right about the devil inside him. The dark skin of the Muslims in comparison with the whiteness of Europeans was perceived as the mark of God’s curse (Vitkus, 2003, p. 102). As we have seen in the first two acts of the play, Othello’s speech and manner go against the common prejudice about Easterners and dark-skinned people. By the end, he turns to a dark person because of the conversion of his soul to Turkish. He is now black inside and outside (Vitkus, 2003, p. 103); as Emilia states about Othello, “O, the more angel she, and you the blacker devil!” (5.2.140). She points out the contrast between white innocent Desdemona and black devilish Othello. In Christianity, the white represents the heavenly, while the black is a sign of damnation. Shakespeare, in the play, demonstrates how some innate attributes associated with certain ethnicities never change; they may be hidden but they eventually burst out after stimulation. Damnation is the preferred ultimate penalty the English imagined for all those who choose to convert. Othello, the baptized Moor who turned Turk, is doubly damned for backsliding. He was sent to perform a crusade against Islamic imperialism, instead, he returned Turk and became the enemy within. He has let Venice down by turning to the black Muslim Other, the xenophobic fantasy of Europeans. Othello’s initial identity as “the noble Moor of Venice” has now vanished and become the ugly stereotype. He now portrays the stereotypical cruel Moor or Turk who is jealous, violent, merciless, faithless, lawless and desperate. By stabbing himself, Othello punishes and damns the Turk he has become.

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