

*ISSN : 2225-8078*

# *Praxis*

**A Peer-Reviewed Journal of  
The Department of English  
University of Rajshahi**

**Editor**

Dr. Md. Sakhawat Hossain

**Associate Editors**

Dr. Mahbuba Hasina

Dr. Md. Alamgir Hossain

**VOLUME 15  
December 2025**

**ISSN : 2225-8078**

# **Praxis**

A Peer-Reviewed Journal of the Department of English, Rajshahi University

Volume 15  
December 2025

**ISSN 2225-8078**

## **Editor**

Dr. Md. Sakhawat Hossain

## **Associate Editors**

Dr. Mahbuba Hasina

Dr. Md. Alamgir Hossain

## **Published by**

The Department of English, Rajshahi University

## **Printed by**

The City Offset Printers  
Talaimari, Rajshahi

Price: 300 Taka  
10 US Dollars

## Editorial Preface

*Praxis: Journal of the Department of English, University of Rajshahi* is committed to maintaining rigorous academic and ethical standards in the publication of scholarly research in the English language, linguistics, and literature. As a double-blind peer-reviewed journal, *Praxis* ensures that all submitted manuscripts undergo an impartial and thorough evaluation process, safeguarding both academic integrity and intellectual merit.

The journal adheres strictly to a policy of originality. Submissions are unpublished and not be under consideration for publication elsewhere. Any form of plagiarism, including self-plagiarism, is considered a serious breach of academic ethics and results in immediate rejection. Authors are responsible for ensuring the authenticity of their work and for properly acknowledging all sources in accordance with recognized citation standards.

To maintain disciplinary coherence while encouraging intellectual diversity, *Praxis* accepts contributions primarily within the fields of English studies, linguistics and English Language Teaching. Interdisciplinary work is welcomed, provided it demonstrates a clear and substantive engagement with these core areas. All manuscripts are written in English and follow either the MLA (9th edition) or the APA (7th edition) style, depending on the disciplinary orientation of the paper.

The journal enforces a structured submission protocol. Manuscripts fall within the prescribed length and include an abstract and a brief author bio-note. Submissions are accepted in both print and digital formats, prepared according to specified formatting guidelines. To ensure equitable representation, each author is permitted to submit only one manuscript per volume. In cases of joint authorship, full disclosure of all contributors and their institutional affiliations is required.

The editorial board reserves the right to make necessary revisions for clarity, coherence, and consistency without altering the substantive argument of the work. Final decisions regarding publication rest solely with the editorial board, based on reviewers' recommendations and the journal's standards. Individual authors, and not the Editorial Board, are responsible for the views expressed in their writing.

Through these policies, *Praxis* seeks to uphold excellence, transparency, and fairness in academic publishing, fostering a scholarly environment that values critical inquiry, methodological rigor, and intellectual responsibility.



## **In Memoriam: Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed Md. Sakhawat Hossain**

I had the privilege of being a direct student of Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed, and the memory of his classroom remains one of the most formative experiences of my intellectual life. He was not a teacher of abundance in number, but of precision and distinction; he took relatively few classes, yet each one bore the mark of rare excellence. His lectures were events that were often animated, lucid, and deeply engaging, without ever obscuring the depth of his scholarship.

What set him apart most strikingly was his method. He had the remarkable ability to render even the most extended and complex texts into something graspable without diminishing their intellectual weight. With a lightness of touch and a finely tuned sense of humour, he guided students into the depths of a text as if it were the most natural of movements. His wit was never ornamental; it was pedagogical and it was an instrument through which difficulty dissolved and insight emerged. Many of his students would testify that his classes were filled with mirth, yet never lost their seriousness of purpose.

In demeanour, he was at once formal and disarmingly intimate. His English was impeccable, measured, and refined, reflecting a deep command of language and tradition. Yet he was not bound by rigidity; at moments, he would slip into Bangla, often to delightful effect, using humour to draw students closer into the discussion. He had a characteristic habit of addressing students as “thou,” a gesture that seemed to collapse distance while invoking an older, almost Shakespearean intimacy. Standing before the class, he maintained an alert and penetrating gaze so that no student could afford inattentiveness, yet none felt excluded or disengaged. His presence commanded attention without coercion.

His intellectual range was formidable. He possessed a sharp and integrated knowledge of English literature, history, philosophy, and the broader Christian and Western intellectual traditions. Yet his scholarly vision was not confined within conventional disciplinary boundaries. His doctoral work on the literary techniques of *Surah Yasin* remains a landmark contribution that demonstrates his courageous attempt to bring Islamic textuality into the sphere of literary criticism. In doing so, he opened a space for dialogue between traditions that are too often kept apart.

Born on 31 December 1938, Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed completed his MA in English from the Department of English, University of Rajshahi, in 1960, and qualified in the then Special East Pakistan Civil Service (EPCS) examination. He joined the Department of English at the University of Rajshahi on 10 March 1973 and served there with distinction until his retirement as Professor on 30 December 2004. He passed away on 16 May 2022, leaving behind a legacy of intellectual brilliance, pedagogical excellence, and humane values.



## ***Dedication***



**Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed**

(31 December 1938-16 May 2022)

This Volume is dedicated to the cherished memory of Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed—a teacher of rare brilliance, a scholar of profound humanity.



# Contents

<b>Conrad's Western Women in Exotic Space: A Reading of "Because of the Dollars"</b>	11
Mumtahina Ferdous Marjan Md. Sakhawat Hossain	
<b>The Prospects and Challenges of Developing Learners' Speaking Skill in English at the Secondary Level in Bangladesh</b>	23
Mahbuba Hasina	
<b>Challenges Faced by Early-Career EFL Teachers at the Tertiary Level in Bangladesh</b>	37
Dilshad Jahan Mumu Shawly Sarker Noor E-Zannat Nusha	
<b>When Meals Become Manifestos: Narrating Power and Resistance through Food</b>	57
Irtifa Hasan	
<b>Examining Linda Loman's Idealization and Gender Roles in Arthur Miller's <i>Death of a Salesman</i></b>	69
Saila Ahmed Abdulla-All-Mijan	
<b>Nature's Resistance to Industrialization: An Eco-critical Reading of <i>Sons and Lovers</i> by D.H. Lawrence</b>	79
Shahadat Hossain Rubaiyan Asif	
<b>Understanding Assignment Culture in Tertiary Education: A Review of Key Variables and Learning Impacts</b>	91
Mohammad Rukanuddin A K M Mazharul Islam	
<b>The Limits of Women's Potential in Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's <i>Sultana's Dream and Padmarag</i></b>	105
Farhana Mahzabin	
<b>Beyond the Picturesque: Ecological Consciousness in Wordsworth's Poetry</b>	117
Sutapa Saha Sadia Sabrina Alam	
<b>Resonance of Resistance: Reading Selected Short Stories of Saadat Hasan Manto</b>	131
Munif Mahraf Nafisa Binte Iqbal	

<b>Racial Segregation in Harper Lee's <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> and Maya Angelou's <i>I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings</i>: A Post-Structural Rereading</b>	143
Anamika Shaha Hossain Al Mamun	
<b>Ecological Consciousness and Indigenous Wisdom in Bengali Literature: A Deep Ecological Study of Mahasweta Devi's <i>Aranyer Adhikar</i> and Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's <i>Aranyak</i></b>	157
Kashfia Israt Sanjad Azvi	
<b>"Almost the Same, but Not Quite": Navigating Hybridity and the Third Space in <i>Othello</i></b>	169
Md Raisul Islam Ashik Istiak Nikhate Jannat Binte Zannah	
<b>Colonial Intelligibility and the Politics of Literacy: Language, Power, and the Making of the "Other" in <i>The Tempest</i> and <i>Robinson Crusoe</i></b>	187
Md. Mahbubul Islam Nafisa Binte Rahman	
<b>Gothic Fiction and the Racist Binary: Reevaluating the Feminist Aspects of <i>Jane Eyre</i> from a Postcolonial Lens</b>	199
Samira Siddiqua Shiti Anup Kumar Mitra	
<b>Of Memory, Trauma, and Embodiment: Exploring Sexual Violence in Shaheen Akhtar's <i>The Search</i></b>	211
Liton Chakraborty Mithun	
<b>Beyond the Binary of Utopia/Dystopia: Exploring Alternatives and Ambiguity in Kiran Desai's <i>The Inheritance of Loss</i></b>	223
Nishat Tasnim Tonny	
<b>Digital Eyes, Dystopian Lies: <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> and the Politics of Modern Surveillance</b>	235
Md. Atiqur Rahman	
<b>Patriarchal Oppression and Female Resistance in <i>Desire Under the Elms</i></b>	249
Md. Mahamudul Hasan Mohammad Rahmatullah Tanzila Shahid	

# **“Almost the Same, but Not Quite”: Navigating Hybridity and the Third Space in *Othello***

**Md Raisul Islam**

Graduate Teaching Assistant, The Department of English and Philosophy, Idaho State University, USA

**Ashik Istiak**

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of American Studies, The University of New Mexico, USA

**Nikhate Jannat Binte Zannah**

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Varendra University, Rajshahi

## **Abstract**

William Shakespeare's *Othello* dramatizes the violent consequences of colonial discourse on the hybrid subject. In this analysis, Homi K. Bhabha's theories on hybridity, mimicry, and the third space are used to argue that Othello's tragic downfall results from Venetian society's inability to support the hybrid identity it simultaneously produces and depends upon. By examining Othello's final speech as a failure in the third space rather than a negotiation within it, this analysis illustrates how colonial discourse, through Iago's mimicry and racial stereotyping, forces Othello to internalize the very otherness he perceives in Venice, leading to a self-annihilating act that re-establishes the racial binary he has disrupted in his existence. Furthermore, this analysis expands on Othello's racial identity by examining how the handkerchief is a hybrid piece of culture that Iago works through in his plan for Othello's downfall, as well as how Desdemona and Emilia's gender places them in a third space similar yet different from Othello's, one formed by performativity instead of embodiment. This essay reveals a limitation in Bhabha's theories of hybridity that the third space is available only to certain hybrid subjects, while others remain trapped in a binary opposition from which they cannot escape.

**Keywords:** Identity, Violence, Third space, Hybridity, Ambivalence, Mimicry.

## **Introduction**

Shakespeare's tragedy of *Othello* portrays the divisions and contradictions that emerge when a racialized stranger is at once accepted and rejected in the society they serve — a phenomenon which, as Mark Matheson suggests, “complicates the ongoing process of cultural exchange” within Venice's expanding mercantile world (123). Venice emerged as a mercantile power during the colonial period due to trade, as depicted in plays like *Othello*, where government institutions are seen to be “shaping interaction among private interests” (Chojnacki 28), indicating a vast formation of multicultural societies accommodating diversified identities that erupted based on race, economy, and military power. The Empire's growing wealth camouflaged the identity and power conflicts beneath it, as Edward Said describes the “imperial imaginary” in which empires forge a false narrative of cultural supremacy to cloak their subjugation (Said 71). Through *Othello*, Shakespeare goes beyond personal conflict to demonstrate cultural disintegration caused by systemic forces. Venice in *Othello* is not a nineteenth-century colonial empire but a bustling trading hub with early colonial contacts with the Ottoman Empire and North Africa, reflecting what Loomba describes as the usefulness of thinking about the “early modern” as the “early colonial” (*Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism* 16).

Following the arguments of race studies scholars such as Loomba, Hall, and Vitkus, it is evident that colonial conversation is a system that precedes colonialism. Bhabha's theories, though intended for a different period, help us understand the logic behind these proto-colonial contacts, and the play does this in a surprisingly clear fashion. The main argument of this paper is not that Venice is a colony, but that the play illustrates the emergence of (post)colonial racial thought.

Othello's existence is paradoxical. On the one hand, his identity shatters the system. On the other hand, his military service underlies it. His suicide is an attempt to reclaim the "justice" forced upon him. This act is juxtaposed with colonial violence: Othello shatters the "Turk" within himself. His destruction comes from his assimilation to Western values — the very values Venice demanded of him — which traps the colonized subject in a system that both *affirms and negates*<sup>11</sup> his identity. In this bitterly ironic fashion, the play indicts the very colonial logic that produces and then destroys the hybrid subject it depends upon. It captures and seeks to *civilize* the elements they consider *barbaric*. This proto-colonial racial logic operates on what Jones et al. identify as the monoracial master narrative, under which "racial groups are seen as firmly bounded and mutually exclusive," making it structurally impossible for hybrid identity to be recognized as legitimate within the dominant social order (39). The colonial construction of Othello's identity serves deeper purposes than mere representation in a colonial narrative. Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of hybridity, mimicry, and the third space are fundamental for analyzing Othello's struggle in Venetian society. The third space, as Bhabha theorizes it, is a liminal and unstable discursive site where the colonizer and the colonized encounter one another, producing hybrid identities that destabilize the self/other binaries colonial power depends upon (53-55). Crucially, this space does not simply blend two cultures — it unsettles both, revealing that cultural identities are not fixed or monolithic but constituted through ongoing negotiation and conflict. From a hybridity perspective, identity includes features from both colonizers and colonized with rigid boundaries (145). Moreover, mimicry is defined as "almost the same but not quite" (Bhabha 122). It is the colonized subject impersonating the colonizer and reveals the weaker side of colonial rule. Crucially, Bhabha insists that this Third Space is "though unrepresentable in itself" — a precondition for enunciation rather than a stable location — and this unrepresentability is precisely what renders Othello's position in Venice so structurally volatile (55). As Bhabha further elaborates, it is "the 'inter' — the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space — that carries the burden of the meaning of culture," enabling us to "elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves" (56). This formulation is essential to reading Othello's tragedy: it is not who he is, but what the irresolvable interstitial space between cultures does to selfhood. Furthermore, Bhabha specifies that mimicry is not mere imitation but "the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power" — and simultaneously "the sign of the inappropriate," a "difference or recalcitrance" that "poses an immanent threat" to normalized colonial authority (123). Othello's mimicry of Venetian civility thus functions in both directions: it is the condition of his acceptance and the source of Venice's terror of him. Othello, the Moor, undergoes these transformations as an outsider in Venice. He is caught between admiration and disdain because of his race. He is celebrated as a military hero. His existence forces him into a dualistic position. He straddles a powerful and powerless third space. However, this unsettling space finally leads him to destruction. If observed closely, Venetian society is responsible for failing to embrace its national hero. As Istiak and Karim argue in their analysis of alterity in

---

<sup>11</sup> This paper uses italics to emphasize ideas that the authors consider especially significant.

Shakespeare, "It is not the characters but the system running through the society is the culprit. The system has created the very evil it condemns" (51). Othello's tragedy is not a personal failure. It is the product of Venetian society's refusal to accept his hybrid identity. This paper utilizes Bhabha's theories to analyze the colonial forces at work in Othello's identity and demise. It examines Othello's hybrid identity and his inclusion and exclusion from Venetian society. Next, it focuses on the meaning of the handkerchief, viewing it as a mark of cultural hybridity that both transcends and collapses colonial borders, amplifying racial tension. Finally, it explores how women in Venetian society are excluded from cultural involvement and power, find themselves in a hybrid "third space," and are used as tools by male dominance.

### **Othello's Identity in the Third Space**

In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha notes that power within colonialism is always in a state of tension or relatively unstable because the subjugated subject attempts to do the act of the colonizer, which is mentioned as "almost the same, but not quite" (122). Similarly, Othello, as an outsider, seeks to establish himself in multiple ways to balance his unsettling identity in Venice. One way is storytelling, through which he shapes how Venetian society accepts him despite his outsider status. Building on this, Susan Arndt argues that Othello's speech about "the battles, sieges, fortunes / That I have passed" (Shakespeare 1.3.151-152) shows "strategic mimicry" because he tells his story in a way that fits Venetian expectations while also subtly questioning them (Arndt 409). Drawing on Mary Louise Pratt's concept of autoethnography—a practice where a marginalized subject produces a self-authored account that responds to and reframes the dominant group's representations—Arndt explains that Othello "practices 'strategic mimicry' in Bhabha's sense, of both disrupting their very inner Self as well as the mainstream discourse about their being the Other" (409). In this sense, Othello's speech serves as a kind of ethnographic counter-narrative, recasting himself not just as an object of Venetian curiosity but as an agent who participates in defining his own story within the contact zone of cross-cultural encounter. For example, although he tells exotic stories like "the cannibals that each other eat" (Shakespeare 1.3.144), he also describes "being taken by the insolent foe / And sold to slavery; of...redemption thence" (1.3.138-139), which, as Arndt notes, showed sympathy for enslaved people that "was not compatible with the mainstream plans of Elizabethan England for joining the business of enslaving Africans" (409-410). This structural anxiety about narrative ownership finds a broader theoretical frame in Said, who argues that the dominant culture's power to speak *for* the racialized subject — rather than allowing them to speak for themselves — is not incidental but constitutive of colonial discourse itself (Said 6). Vanessa Corredera argues that Othello's plea to "Speak of me as I am" (Shakespeare 5.2.402) exposes "his fear over the fate of his story," rooted in the anxiety that Venetian storytellers will "lessen in representation" the singular Black figure in their midst (Corredera 3-4); and, crucially, that no reanimation of this play — past or present — is "ever ideologically neutral when it comes to race" (27).

Bhabha explains the third space as a discursive space where "the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (Bhabha 55). Moosavinia and Hosseini argue accordingly that Othello, caught between Moorish heritage and Venetian expectations, inhabits precisely this "in-between" space that "belongs to neither of the poles" (336). This condition finds empirical resonance in Huang and Degner's study of mixed-race social identity, which identifies an "invalidated border type" — individuals who self-categorize as hybrid but are socially treated as monoracial (9). Such individuals demonstrate weakened identification with the dominant group and heightened identification with the minoritized group, a pattern that maps directly onto

Othello's experience: Venice continuously refuses his self-categorization as Venetian, driving him toward the singular racial "other" that Iago constructs for him (11). This 'in-between' space takes a heavy toll on the identity in several ways. Othello's identity is initially "translated" through his preoccupation with his conversion to Christianity and his military service, which allows him to serve the Venetian society. This transformation is not merely superficial; it is the foundation of his belonging. In Act 1, Othello actively translates his exotic past into a language that the Venetians can admire and even fall in love with. He recounts his adventures to Desdemona, who would *seriously incline* to listen, and she loved him for the dangers he had passed through. This narrative act translates his *otherness* into a form of heroic value that the Venetian state can use. However, this translation is always precarious. Iago, the play's primary agent of destabilization, threatens to undo Othello's Christian identity. He cynically suggests that Desdemona could make Othello "renounce his baptism, / All seals and symbols of redeemed sin" (Shakespeare 2.3.363-364). This statement is crucial because it confirms that Othello is a convert, and it exposes the early modern anxiety that such conversions might not be absolute or permanent. His Christian identity is thus, on one hand, a "translation" that can be reversed, and, on the other hand, an unsettling hybrid one. As the play progresses, Iago successfully works to "rehistoricize" Othello, pulling him out of his Venetian present and re-associating him with the Islamic world he was once meant to fight against. This process is most powerfully realized in Othello's final speech. Before killing himself, Othello tells a story about a time in Aleppo where he saw "a malignant and a turban'd Turk / Beat a Venetian and traduced the state" (5.2.414-415). In a shocking turn, he reveals that he "took by th' throat the circumcised dog / And smote him—thus" (416-417), at which point he stabs himself. In this moment, Othello rehistoricizes his own hybrid identity, fracturing it into three parts. He is simultaneously the Venetian defending the state, the "turbaned Turk" who "threatens it from within, and an othered "figure of blackness" who although a Christianized Moor,...retains traces of Islamic identity and serves as a focal point for anxieties about how converts to Christianity might betray their new faith and become an internal threat to Christendom (Vitkus 218). This act demonstrates how the "Third Space" he inhabits can collapse, forcing him to see himself through the racist lens that Iago has constructed. He has internalized the identity of the outsider, the enemy of the state he once served. Jones et al. theorize that "push and pull factors" — racialized experiences shaped by macrosystem race dynamics — directly determine "how individuals choose to identify at the microlevel" (40). Iago functions precisely as this external "push" factor: through relentless racial destabilization, he dismantles Othello's hybrid self-categorization until the only identity available is the one Venice assigned him from the beginning.

The act of mimicry positions the strongly unified 'top' in a very ambivalent light and makes the subordinate 'bottom' hierarchy very fragile. This tension between assimilation and difference resonates with Othello's duality as both a black Moor and a Venetian military leader. These identities are so different and complex that they can barely coexist simultaneously in Venetian society. Thus, the society that relies on Othello is also seen to be full of hatred towards him. Bhabha's preoccupation with these issues mirrors Fanon's concern, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, with race, and is the core of the phrase 'the gaze' the mechanism through which colonized people experience the dispossession of the self (89). The 'gaze' disproves the self; like Fanon, Bhabha argues that cultural dislocation inflicts psychological violence and racial tension where the black Moor's intimacy with the Venetian white girl is widely considered as the binary of "barbarism and civility", and it is pretty apparent and evident that Othello falls under "barbarism" (59). In Othello's case, the perpetual fluctuation between self-hatred as a racialized 'other' and his identity as a Venetian military leader exemplifies the destructive effects of cultural dislocation.

Bhabha's work is in dialogue with Said's *Orientalism*, which argues that colonial discourse does not merely describe the racialized Other but actively *produces* them — constructing identities through representation in ways that serve the interests of the dominant culture (Said 5–6). Where Said, however, tends to fix the colonizer/colonized binary as relatively stable, Bhabha's third space introduces slippage and ambivalence into that structure, revealing colonial authority as always incomplete. However, while Said focuses on fixed colonial opposites, Bhabha's third space shifts these divides, showing identity as more complex and causal. The 'barbaric' identity is not always othered, rather it is embraced and valued when it comes to the sovereignty of Venice, indicating a negotiation that both Othello and the Venetians have to rely on to balance and make sure everything is in order. Therefore, the self-other binary is not functioning as expected. For Othello, this contributes to hyper agency and hyper vulnerability simultaneously. His military skills allow him to access the Venetian society, but his Blackness others him. Brown et al. document how the intertwining of racial and social oppression produces "microaggressive actions that negate and diminish" the racialized subject's sense of self-worth and self-efficacy (988). The slurs directed at Othello — "thicklips," "old black ram," "sooty bosom" — are not isolated insults but expressions of precisely this systemic discourse: a colonial apparatus designed to structurally undermine the psychological foundations of racialized identity, no matter how high the subject's institutional standing. The handkerchief that represents his hybrid identity of African and European origins embodies Bhabha's concept of the "ambivalent" cultural object (145). In the same way, Othello's insecurities are manipulated by Iago, which is what Bhabha calls the "menace of mimicry," where the subjugated Other, partially adopting the norms of the colonizer, becomes a threat to the colonizer's rule (126). More precisely, Bhabha explains that "the menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority" (126) — so the threat runs in both directions. Additionally, Bhabha's account of mimicry fixes the colonial subject as a "partial presence" — meaning simultaneously "incomplete and virtual" — a formulation that maps precisely onto Othello's status in Venice: he is always provisionally there, his belonging contingent and revocable (123). This partial presence is compounded by what Bhabha, in the introduction to *The Location of Culture*, calls the "unhomely" — a paradigmatic colonial and postcolonial condition in which "the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting" (13). The unhomely maps with precision onto Othello's domestic tragedy: the bedchamber in Cyprus — the most intimate private space — becomes the theater of colonial violence. Iago's entire plot operates through the domestic realm: the handkerchief, marital fidelity, and the marriage bed. When Othello cries "O, now, for ever / Farewell the tranquil mind" (Shakespeare 3.3.399–400), it is the unhomely moment — the collapse of any distinction between his private self and the racial discourse that surrounds him — that marks the beginning of his annihilation. The third space is created at the intersection of cultures, where narratives of masters and enslaved people come into contact and hybrid identities are formed through negotiation. As Shalini and Batta argue in their 2024 analysis of Bhabha's framework, the third space is "the very arena where identities are actively constructed and negotiated," producing "hybrid identities that defy the rigid categories of colonizer and colonized" (65-67). Othello's identity, forged in the intersection of Moorish heritage and Venetian service, exemplifies this dynamic negotiation—yet Venetian society refuses to recognize it. As Abbas and Hamad argue in their 2025 analysis, the third Space functions as "a postcolonial liminal zone" where identity is shaped by "colonial trauma" and becomes "inexorably linked" to both the past and the present, and the self and the other (8-11). Othello, caught between his Moorish heritage and Venetian service, occupies precisely this unstable space. The

climax of this traumatic identity crisis is in Act 5, Scene 2. After murdering Desdemona and learning of Iago's treachery, Othello is left with a fragmented self. He delivers a final monologue that attempts to piece together his life for the Venetian officials who have come to arrest him. He begins by asking them to speak of him as one that loved not wisely but too well. This is the present self—the loving, if tragically flawed, husband. He then reaches into his past, recalling a specific moment of service to the Venetian state:

...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  
Their medicinal gum. Set you down this;  
And say besides, that 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. (Shakespeare 5.2.407-417)

This speech is an example of what Bhabha called the "third space," but here it is a collapse rather than a negotiation. Note the grammar: "one whose hand / I took," then "I took my eye out too," then he acts out the killing of himself. The past, present, and "thus" of the stage action all blend together into a single moment. This is not a creative cultural mixing; this is a hybridity of collapse. The Venetian self and the Turkish other do not coexist; one of them has to die. Othello plays the role of the one who kills and the one who is killed; he has taken in the racial thinking of Venice. The third space here is not a space but a trap from which there is no exit. In this moment, the "colonial trauma" Abbas and Hamad describe becomes violently literal (196). Othello's identity splits. He is no longer just the Venetian general, the "self." He has been so thoroughly poisoned by Iago's insinuations and his own internalized otherness that he now sees the "Turk"—the enemy, the infidel, the racial and religious "other"—within himself. He collapses his own history by conflating the heroic act of his past (killing a Turk who threatened a Venetian) with the "malignant" act of his present (killing Desdemona, a Venetian). By stabbing himself as he says "thus," he simultaneously enacts the roles of both the Venetian (the righteous defender of the state) and the Turk (the "circumcised dog" who must be executed). The self and the other become one and the same, destroyed in a single, traumatic act. He uses a foundational memory from his past—a moment that once defined his loyalty to Venice—to execute judgment on his present self. This is the ultimate tragedy of his liminal position: he has been so destabilized that the only way to resolve the conflict between his two identities is to annihilate them both. Bhabha describes these spaces as the "in-between" as new identities are formed through the conflict of cultures and ambivalence (37). Such hybridity is apparent in Othello, where the main character simultaneously identifies as a blend of an insider and an outsider in the ethnically exclusive Venetian society. Even though Othello is considered "valiant" (Shakespeare 1.3.56) and is appreciated for his militaristic endeavors, he suffers racial disparagement by being called "thick-lips" and "an old black ram" (1.1.72-97). Both sides of the stereotypes are true and reveal the contradiction found in colonialism, where the racialized subject is simultaneously needed and unwanted. They are relied upon to serve society but are not fully welcomed in the social structure. As Loomba argues, Othello moves from being a colonized subject on the terms of white Venetian society until he occupies his "true" position as its other (Loomba, *Gender, Race, Renaissance* 48) — a paradox of being simultaneously indispensable and inadmissible. Inherent in this paradox is a colonial condition that constitutes racialized subjects suspended in a perpetual

state of being recognized and excluded. Such contradictions render it impossible for societies premised on racial hierarchies to either fully accept or completely deny people from socially marginalized groups. Othello is a liminal being caught in the middle of binary oppositions, and without this ascribed third space, he is susceptible to a tragic identity crisis. His sociopolitical ambiguity, integration, or self-definition within a well-defined social system is the essence of his demise. Bhabha provides a critique by saying that alienation and aggression are not external faults but rather built within the system of civil power (62). Othello's alienation is not only a case of lack of recognition on the part of the Venetian society; it is also one of its systemic contradictions: an aporia that both honors and dehumanizes him as a racial other. Being a black man, he is an esteemed military servant and a racialized Other at the same time. This duality creates an inner conflict. The following quote clearly shows this self-inflicted weakness:

Haply, for I am black  
And have not those soft parts of conversation  
That chamberers have (Shakespeare 3.3.304-306).

Othello here concedes a social polish deficit that, to him, corresponds to his race and invites rejection. Both self-loathing and the weight of the Venetian expectations lead him to his tragic end. The imposed violence is directed toward the self – first onto Desdemona and ultimately onto his eyes. The madness and self-destruction are not of external origin but rather internal, stemming from a civil society's inability to balance the individual with the collective. Othello's tragedy illustrates the aftermath of colonial powers dismantling the self through a lack of national identity; the unresolved identity conflicts, coupled with self and societal acceptance, lead to violence, both within and outside.

Othello's hybrid identity becomes even more complex with his marriage to Desdemona, a white Venetian noblewoman. When Othello says, "I won his daughter" (Shakespeare 1.3.111) from the tales of "disastrous chances" (1.3.155), it illustrates his struggle to integrate colonialism through the construction of dangerous narratives, which Bhabha sees as essential in colonial identity negotiation (Bhabha 162). However, this narration power is taken from Iago, who commands Othello's Otherness through his xenophobic language, making him a "Barbary horse" (Shakespeare 1.1.125). Iago's plan exacerbates Othello's subservience as it belies the weakness of Othello's place within the third space; even in victory, one is overshadowed by racially based assumptions of failure. In the words of C. Bartels, under the influence of Iago's racist rhetoric, Othello comes to see that difference as a burden and begins to view himself in a negative and categorical way as a Moor (181). Desdemona's part in this scenario demonstrates the intersection of gender and hybridity. On the one hand, her affection for Othello, which is initially framed as liberating and transgressive, reinforces Venetian customs by leaving her to serve as a token of "civilizing" chastity. Her promise to "trumpet to the world" (Shakespeare 1.3.285) and her affection for him embody an interracial utopia, but tragically, her death by his hand confirms the lack of harmony that exists in a social order built upon racial domination. This ambiguity is very much what Frantz Fanon's account of colonial neurosis suggests: that interracial intimacy is a space of "recognition and subjugation" (63). Thus, Desdemona's death illustrates the violence of the third space, indicting the obliteration of hybrid potential by a world that cannot entertain the notion of ambiguity.

### **Cultural Hybridity and the Racial Tensions**

*Othello* presents a paradoxical negative effect of mixed culture as it strives to depict the constant and incessant conflict between good and evil, black and white, boon and bane, truth and falsehood—so many concepts juxtaposed to each other by race, gender, and physical features.

These contradictions result from specific conditions and are the outcomes of the challenges resulting from a mixed culture, as Othello, the most significant and mightiest general of the Venetians, falls victim to alterity on account of his color and racial identity, as Innes terms Othello as “an untamed savage at heart [who] has to be civilised and uncivilized” (81-82). Then, the violence-laden personality and otherness continue to develop with the progression of the play. Othello, the noble and gallant general, is the target of vicious criticisms purely on the racial credentials of being a Moor and, more precisely, a black Moor. In addition, Othello suffers at the hands of his compatriots because of his race, as his compatriots regard him as a stranger. While collaborating with the rest of the world, Othello adopts the culture and norms of Venetian society, which he strives to serve. Such a collision signifies the breaking apart of the binary opposition self-other, leading toward hybridity.

Colonial discourse focuses on encouraging obedience to the colonizer’s behavioral patterns while hoping for a difference that’s nearly impossible to eliminate; the subject is expected to be “almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha 122). Othello's duality oscillation is also evident; he attempts to integrate into Venetian society by accepting its language and values, but his foreignness stems mainly from his race. This duality creates a rupture in the cultivation of the dominant narrative, enabling hybrid identities to surface in the third space. Othello’s vivid description of his life to the Venetian Senate, “She loved me for the dangers I had pass’d, And I loved her that she did pity them” (Shakespeare 1.3.193-194), showcases the Venetian rhetorical norms. Othello’s storytelling conforms to the Venetian nobles’ order of speaking as an effort to claim his identity from the colonizer. Notably, however, this “identity” is lost in times of crisis, which occurs frequently in Othello’s case. For instance, his frantic declaration, “O, blood, blood, blood!” (3.3.512) exposes the extreme vulnerability of his identity. Bhabha comments that when cultural difference is expressed but not entirely resolved, it constitutes an ambivalent space. Thus, he refers to it as “the third space” (112). Othello’s militaristic history contributes to his already complex hybrid identity. Being a Moorish general earns him some respect - “Valiant Othello, we must straight employ you / Against the general enemy Ottoman” (Shakespeare 1.3.56-57). However, his acceptance of his functionality is always circumstantial. His stories of “battles, sieges, fortunes” (151) are a cocktail of Moorish and Venetian elements that create a hybrid identity. This makes Desdemona fall in love with him, but it is still insufficient for her to belong to society. Once his military function is a resource in Cyprus, Othello’s racial identity becomes more of a liability than an asset. Iago’s scoffs show that “an old black ram / Is topping your white ewe” (1.1.97-98). This change highlights Bhabha’s view of hybridity as something that is joyous and, at other times, threatening, where the colonized individual’s worth is meaningless and can be taken away without any warning (Bhabha 159) not to mention the fact that Othello’s “Then must you speak / Of one that loved not wisely but too well” (Shakespeare 5.2.403-405) signifies that he understands his ‘othered’ state of being caught up and torn between Moorish love and passion and Venetian discipline. This is how Othello can dwell within this “third space” by using the language and culture of Venetians, but his skin color and the fact that he is black mean that he is treated as a migrant, more precisely, as the other. Othello’s hybridity acts as a double-edged sword. It temporarily grants him acceptance but also exposes him to racial discrimination, which drives the tragedy.

The shaded structures of identity and otherness are not limited to racial separations, as the rigid boundaries also apply to relations among members of the same culture. The dangers of ethnocentrism are far-reaching. Iago’s elaborate scheming against Cassio reveals how notions of alterity can be internalized and break bonds within the group, eventually causing Cassio to clash

with those in power. As Iago manipulates Cassio's reputation, he plants suspicion in Othello's mind, saying, "Look to your wife; observe her well with Cassio; / Wear your eye thus, not jealous nor secure" (3.3.228-229). In the same way, the women, Desdemona, Bianca, and Emilia, are not homogeneous as they share a gender category. Instead, they are defined and differentiated by more subtle, salient boundaries and social expectations. For instance, Emilia challenges gendered norms when she asserts, "But I do think it is their husbands' faults / If wives do fall" (4.3.85-86), contrasting with Desdemona's more submissive stance. These differences illustrate and manifest the degree to which the issue of mixed cultures poses a challenge, even for communities that appear unitary. Even so, in the face of these contradictions, each character attempts to reclaim control over themselves and, in so doing, shatter the rigid structures of identity constructed by society. Desdemona's defiance shines through when she declares, "I do perceive here a divided duty" (1.3.209), signaling her struggle to reconcile societal expectations with personal agency. This narrative captures what Bhabha evokes in mimicry and the "third space" where the self and others become margins of the incessant fluidity of becoming (Bhabha 127). Desdemona's rejection of Venetian suitors in favor of Othello exemplifies a horizontal relationship (mutual, egalitarian) emerging within a vertical power structure (hierarchical, colonial), thereby embodying Bhabha's "third space" as a site of subversion. In her defiance of racial and gendered hierarchies, Desdemona reconfigures her agency through a bond that transcends the Venetian patriarchy's rigid binaries. While the vertical axis of power in Othello—rooted in colonial and patriarchal domination—positions Othello as an outsider and Desdemona as a subordinate woman, their marriage disrupts these hierarchies by asserting a horizontal, reciprocal connection. As Anne McClintock argues, colonial societies enforce vertical relationships of power that racialize and gender subjects to maintain imperial order (5). Desdemona's choice to consecrate herself to Othello's mind and "valiant parts" (Shakespeare 1.3.288) rejects the vertical logic of Venetian society, which privileges whiteness and patriarchal authority. Instead, her agency fosters a horizontal intimacy that challenges what bell hooks terms the "imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy" by centering mutual recognition over domination (72).

Desdemona's interracial marriage, though ultimately contained by the tragedy's violent conclusion, momentarily destabilizes colonial and gendered norms by positing a relationality outside sanctioned hierarchies (Singh 291). Bhabha's "third space" thus emerges as a hybrid identity and a relational mode that horizontalizes power. This subversion is inherently fragile, as the play's vertical structures reassert control through Othello's internalized racism and Desdemona's death. However, their relationship's fleeting existence underscores the radical potential of horizontal bonds to unsettle oppressive systems, even as they constrain them. Desdemona's valiant defense of her love demonstrates her disregard for culture as she states, "That I did love the Moor to live with him, / My downright violence and storm of fortunes / May trumpet to the world" (Shakespeare 1.3.283-285). This challenge to her father, Brabantio, "A maiden never bold" (1.3.112), and Venetian customs show an openness to embrace Othello's mixed world. However, this straying from boundaries elicits a negative response as Brabantio blames Othello for using magic: "She is abused, stol'n from me, and corrupted / By spells and medicines bought of mountebanks" (1.3.73-74). Instead, this response illustrates the discomfort hybrid identities create within society, as her marriage to Othello crosses the boundaries of race and gender. Kim Hall's analysis asserts that Desdemona's decision indicates a "dangerous intimacy" that colonial societies tend to fear and quash (180). Her later statement, "Banish me, my lord, but kill me not!" (Shakespeare 5.2.98), shows that she is trapped in this impossible hybrid space of power and victimization. While Desdemona's complex marriage to Othello helps

challenge the boundaries set around race and gender, it places her in the sight of patriarchal and racial vengeance. She exists in the troubled position of the hybrid victim, which is both a liberating and dangerous state. This position illustrates how power can be resisted yet remains deeply embedded within the dominant structures of power.

Cassio, who is referred to as “a soldier fit to stand by Caesar / And give direction,” is polished (2.3.126-127). Othello wishes to achieve this image of civility but is never able to achieve it because he is racially othered. This part of Bhabha’s description of hybrid identity deals with power relations (86). Cassio’s role as “Lieutenant to the warlike Moor Othello” (Shakespeare 2.1.30) reinforces his alignment with Venetian ideals of discipline and propriety, contrasting with Othello’s exoticized military prowess. However, his drunken fall—“Do not think, gentlemen. I am drunk” (2.3.117)—exposes his instability, paralleling Othello’s unraveling. Iago exploits this vulnerability, noting, “He hath a daily beauty in his life / That makes me ugly” (5.1.20-21), revealing Cassio’s idealized status as a threat even within Venetian ranks. This moment suggests that the “third space” destabilizes all identities, not just the racially Othered. Scholar Stephen Greenblatt argues that Cassio’s lapse reflects the fragility of colonial hierarchies, where even the exemplar can falter (68). Cassio’s embodiment of Venetian norms contrasts with Othello’s hybridity, yet his flaws reveal the instability inherent in the “third space.” This comparison clarifies how hybridity affects the colonizer and colonized, undermining rigid cultural distinctions. The Duke’s praise, “If virtue no delighted beauty lack, / Your son-in-law is far more fair than black,” (Shakespeare 1.3.330-331) on face value appears to incorporate Othello, but the racial nuance demonstrates Bhabha’s colonial ambivalence. His attitude is best captured in Hall’s “concealed exclusion” (179). Accepting the Senate is always instrumental; in this case, Othello’s military value is that “[t]he Turk with a most mighty preparation makes for Cyprus” (Shakespeare 1.3.254-255). The Duke’s compliment suggests Othello’s merit might redeem his black skin, but only in part, and with the expectation that he will be helpful. This tension is repeated in the Cyprus setting, where Othello’s command diminishes, giving birth to slurs like the Moor. Said notes that this is a colonial perspective in which the Other is appreciated for their servitude (101). In conjunction with the “We are very sorry for’t” (Shakespeare 1.3.88) dismissal of Brabantio’s complaints, the Senate demonstrates this applicable tolerance devoid of nationalistic notions of race. The Senate’s partial acceptance of Othello clarifies the hybrid identity that the colonizer accepts in the third space, revealing the deeper forces that govern the flexibility of this “space” and explaining Othello’s rejection. Cassio’s place also illuminates Othello’s, by way of contrast. Cassio, a Florentine in Venice, like Othello, is an outsider, but he is able to fit in, whereas Othello is not. By Iago’s comment that Cassio is “a soldier fit to stand by Caesar” (2.3.126), we see that Cassio can be understood within Venetian society. What’s different, of course, is that Cassio is a white man, Othello is a black man. Cassio’s lapse as a drunkard can be overlooked, but Othello’s racial difference cannot. This comparison also underscores a side of Bhabha’s argument that he plays down: that hybridity may not be equally distributed. Some outsiders can become Venetian, but others, who are physically different, are “almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha 122), not because of their actions, but because of how others perceive them. But again, that’s based on bodily differences.

Although Venice uses Othello’s Moorish martial abilities, there is still fear behind the power, as shown through Brabantio’s phrase, “Thou hast practiced on her with foul charms” (Shakespeare 1.2.92). He is afraid that he has manipulated her through treacherous means. As Bhabha puts it, hybridity is linked to colonial usefulness (Bhabha 159), whereas Said interprets this as the West viewing the other as both useful and dangerous to them simultaneously (Said

101). Othello, being employed as "Valiant Othello, we must straight employ you" (Shakespeare 1.3.58), takes full advantage of his outsider identity as a warrior, which simultaneously exoticizes him. His description of "Cannibals that each other eat, / The Anthropophagi" (1.3.166-167) enchants the Venetians. He commands, "To th' platform, masters; come, let's set the watch" (2.1.124) while in Cyprus, and even though it asserts power, it fails alongside Iago's undermining of it, making his already fragile position more difficult to bear. Critic Michael Neill observes that the military office that *Othello* is a play full of racial feeling — perhaps the first work in English to explore the roots of such feeling." (394). Othello's military hybridity is indeed empowering, but it also sets him apart. It is now clearer how colonial societies exploited and feared each other to create Othello's tragic loneliness. Iago's background is a strange mixture. He is a Moor's man, he is commanded by an outsider, and he hates it. This is demonstrated by his statement, "I follow him to serve my turn upon him" (Shakespeare 1.1.45). This is a strange mixture of loyalty and deceit. However, Iago's mixture is one he chooses. He can choose to end it at any time. This is very different from Othello's mixture, which is literally written on his body as a symbol of the privileged position in Venetian society. A resentful servant remains within the world's boundaries, while the loyal general exists outside. Iago is not the source of Othello's tragedy. He is a symbol of it. He is a symbol of the monsters that Venetian society created.

The handkerchief in Shakespeare's *Othello* is a striking blend of artifacts that reveals the combination of Moorish and Venetian cultures while also displaying the fragility of those cultures. Othello introduced it as a gift of exotic origin, saying, "That handkerchief / Did an Egyptian to my mother give" (Shakespeare 3.4.65-66), associating it with his Moorish roots and saying it is "dyed in mummy which the skilful / Conserved of maidens' hearts" (3.4.86-87). This gives it a mystical value deeply embedded in his identity. He notes casually that he will "have the work ta'en out" (3.3.340), showing her side of the pendant, which is purely domestic. Those are Venetian norms. This duality situates the handkerchief as a "third space" ( Bhabha 53). Still, its hybrid nature makes it susceptible to reinterpretation. Iago manipulates this incoherence when he claims, "Trifles light as air / Are to the jealous confirmations strong" (Shakespeare 3.3.370-371), where he metamorphoses the handkerchief from a love token into a proof of betrayal. As scholar Dymphna Callaghan points out, its exotic origins only strengthen its function as a site of cultural collision, further aggravating the tragedy (89). What starts as a link between Othello and Desdemona transforms into a tool that separates them while symbolizing broader integration issues. The handkerchief illustrates the sad idea of blending cultures. It is a thing that blends Egyptian magic with Venetian domesticity. It should symbolize blending cultures. But it shows that blending cultures cannot be done. Something as light as air becomes heavy enough to destroy two people. Iago recognizes that blending cultures means that cultures can be read in two different ways. Iago does not make Othello jealous. Iago exploits the fear that Othello's Moorish background instilled in his Venetian background. The handkerchief represents a third place that becomes reality. And like Othello, it cannot handle how Venetians read it.

### **Mimicry and Colonial Ambivalence**

Bhabha presents his view on mimicry as how the colonized subject replicates their colonizer, resulting in a "reformed, recognizable Other" that is both assuring and antagonistic (86). Bhabha is precise that mimicry is "the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power" but simultaneously "the sign of the inappropriate," intensifying surveillance while posing "an immanent threat to both 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers" (123). This double motion makes mimicry the perfect weapon for Iago: he exploits both sides of Othello's mimicry —

his adoption of Venetian speech and command, and the very difference that mimicry can never fully mask. This ambivalence is a driving force behind the tragedy in Othello as it sustains Othello's exchanges that parody his exploitation. While Othello's command, "Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them" (Shakespeare 1.2.76-77), masks an attempt to exercise Venetian civility, Bhabha would argue that his racial otherness makes such imitation impossible. Any attempt at such imitation produces what Bhabha calls "slippage, its excess, its difference" — a disturbance that undermines the normative order Othello strives to inhabit (Bhabha 122) — and more precisely fixes the colonial subject as a "partial presence," both "incomplete and virtual," never fully inhabiting the world of the colonizer (122–123). Neill argues that Othello occupies a paradoxical position, being viewed simultaneously as both fair and black, a "Christian general and erring barbarian" (411). This split identity reflects the *incomplete and virtual* nature of the colonial subject who can mimic but never fully assimilate the dominant culture. As such, this limitation sharply contrasts the simplistic stereotype of a barbarous Moor, showing that Othello's power manifests in violence precisely because he lacks control. His speech further imitates Venetian decorum: "My services which I have done the signiory / Shall out-tongue his complaints" (Shakespeare 1.2.21-22). Nevertheless, Iago's sarcastic epithet of Othello as "His Moorship's ancient" (1.1.35) ridicules Othello and his mimicry, revealing the absurdity and emptiness of his attempt. Frantz Fanon relates this to a broader case of voluntary bondage in which participants in colonization attempt to hide themselves through mimicry (109). This conflict intensifies in Cyprus in Othello's command, "Hold your hands, / Both you of my inclining, and the rest" (Shakespeare 1.2.82-83), where, at best, he can exercise some power only as an alien. In this way, Othello's partial imitation adds to his feelings of empowerment only to foreshadow destruction, which is the other side of colonial mimicry. Turning mimicry to his advantage, Iago uses Othello's mimicry to slowly tear him apart, which shifts impersonation into a form of warfare. His command, "Wear your eye thus, not jealous nor secure" (3.3.229), employs Othello's adopted Venetian mannerisms in a harmful way. This is an example of Bhabha's colonial ambivalence in which mimicry functions to undermine power (86). One of the terrifying things about *Othello* is that its racial poisons seem so casually concocted, as if racism were just something that Iago, drawing in his improvisational way on a gallimaufry of quite unsystematic prejudices and superstitions, made up as he went along" (Neill 395). Iago's dismissive comment, "O, beware, my lord, of jealousy" (3.3.195), transforms Othello's trust into a jealous, bitter, cynical Venetian. This transformation deepens when Othello exclaims, "Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore" (3.3.411), which is Iago's words said bitterly. In the words of Iago, "I know our country disposition well" (3.3.232), he inflates Othello's foreignness and, in doing so, exposes his weaknesses. Iago transforms Othello's mimicry into an object of colonial subjugation, thereby revealing the limits of enslaved selves within a racially defined order. In Desdemona's admiration for Othello, the colonized are fetishized as objects of desire, capturing the inclination to imitate. The line, "devour up my discourse" (1.3.174), has a Venetian appreciation towards the exotic, yet her affection intensifies: "My heart's subdued / Even to the very quality of my lord" (1.3.285-286). This is Bhabha's model of the other, where the colonizer takes on the other, in this case, more like a reversal (86). On the contrary, Dymphna Callaghan interprets it as a perverse feminine colonial desire to shift the balance of power (92). This grants Othello power but also risks turning him into a caricature, as Brabantio's fury implies: "To fall in love with what she feared to look on" (Shakespeare 1.3.116). Jyotsna G. Singh makes the case that Desdemona's attraction flips the center and periphery, along with the existing order of power (Singh 290). By imitating Othello, the colonized is paradoxically raised by the colonizer's gaze. This bond, however, is tragic because Othello's otherness cannot fully connect with Venetian anticipation.

### **Venetian Women and Vulnerable Hybrid Identity in the Third Space**

*Othello* shows Venetian women as politically, legally, and socially sidelined and stripped of formal education and economic self-sufficiency, which indicates patterns seen across early modern Europe. Stanley Chojnacki has commented on Venetian legislation regarding women's subjugation, especially in inheritance cases where male heirs were favored, "legal codes gave men privileges, for example, precedence to male heirs in inheritance of real estate" (15), and this is echoed in the mosaic Venetians of the play. The 'privilege' goes beyond the law. Instead, its implication is premised upon power, which subjugates women, establishing an all-encompassing "male noble identity" (Chojnacki 16). When Desdemona marries Othello against her father's wishes, Brabantio expresses his bewilderment in "She is abused, stol'n from me, and corrupted / By spells and medicines bought of mountebanks" (Shakespeare 1.3.73-74), demonstrating the social attitude which declines women's essential intellect and human agency by reinforcing the fact that women are to be abused, to be stolen, to be corrupted, and so on. Venetian women are, therefore, categorized into an identity that is neither Venetian nor alien but a wholly unique hybrid identity residing in the third space, where they lose all their human agency and rights and are only bound to serve the male who dominantly controls them, irrespective of domesticity, society, or nationality. Iago's manipulation leverages these customs, highlighting the Venetian women's duplicitousness: "In Venice they do let God see the pranks / They dare not show their husbands. Their best conscience / Is not to leave't undone, but keep't unknown" (3.3.233-236). This stereotype strengthens the tension regarding women's conduct in society and at home, which resonates with Joan Scott's argument that gender served as a "primary way of signifying relationships of power" (42), legitimizing the subjugation of women. Her efforts to influence such as advocating for Cassio, "Why, then, to-morrow night; or Tuesday morn; On Tuesday noon, or night; on Wednesday morn: I prithee, name the time, but let it not / Exceed three days: in faith, he's penitent" (Shakespeare 3.3.68-71) is a tragic misinterpretation that culminates her demise. Even with Venetian women formally excluded in *Othello*, courtesans and noblewomen had parallel channels through which they could exercise power and influence, which Bhabha describes as 'horizontal relationships' within power. This also applies to Bianca, who stands as a bridge between two worlds. Although she is a courtesan, she faces social stigma but still manages to hold some emotional influence. In her defense, she states: "I am no strumpet; but of life as honest / As you that thus abuse me" (5.1.143-144), claiming dignity, which in her case is a denial of the label. On the other hand, Desdemona's attendant, Emilia, exercises agency in her own right along these lines by confronting socially accepted gender roles, as she argues: "Let husbands know / Their wives have sense like them: they see and smell / And have their palates both for sweet and sour, / As husbands have," (4.3.104-108) and questions the prevalence of women's subordination and double standards. Like other women, she struggles to escape domination, as shown in her unmasking of Iago's plans, "I care not for thy sword; I'll make thee known, / Though I lost twenty lives" (5.2.201-202). Having merited her title as a noblewoman, Desdemona wields some form of power through her advocacy and infidelity, as seen in her plea for Cassio. Her loyalty allows her to speak or act on someone's behalf. Even so, this power is limited, as the identity is hybrid. Koleva argues that *Othello* "foregrounds female characters behaving in unruly ways to complicate and critique ideas concerning women's behavior and their duties as daughters and wives that were prevalent during Shakespeare's time" (446). The play does not just reflect these rules—it "destabilizes the very discourse that aimed to regulate" women's behavior (Koleva 465).

Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity helps trace the complexity of Venetian women's roles; as Butler states, "gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin" (175).

The dutiful wife Desdemona performs her role with, “I have not deserved this” and, “I will not stay to offend you” (4.1.271-279), paying respect whilst subversively contesting Othello’s abuse. This aligns with the idea that through rituals such as dowry negotiations, women reproduce societal structures yet have the agency to negotiate power. This ambivalence is showcased further in Emilia’s conversation with Desdemona in Act 4, Scene 3. Desdemona questions, “Dost thou in conscience think--tell me, Emilia-- / That there be women do abuse their husbands / In such gross kind?” (4.3.67-69) to which Emilia replies,

But I do think it is their husbands' faults  
If wives do fall: say that they slack their duties,  
And pour our treasures into foreign laps,  
Or else break out in peevish jealousies,  
Throwing restraint upon us; or say they strike us,  
Or scant our former having in despite;  
Why, we have galls, and though we have some grace,  
Yet have we some revenge. (Shakespeare 4.3.97–104)

Emilia’s response reveals the contradictions within patriarchal systems and carves out a domain for self-determining women, reclaiming agency operating within the bounds of societal expectation. She shifts the blame to men’s actions, arguing that female transgression is a response rather than a punishment for some moral failing. In this regard, she supports Butler’s claim that gender is performative, albeit one that can be performed with resistance, and it indicates Bhabha’s ambivalent ‘negotiation,’ which ultimately empowers and reestablishes male domination within a patriarchal society. Othello demonstrates the migration of gender boundaries by exposing how women, upholding hybrid identity, even when enacting subservience, capture agency to expose these systems of oppression and critique the structures that seek to silence them still. The way it is being done sometimes strengthens the subservience itself. The concept of the woman’s third space differs significantly from Othello’s. Desdemona and Emilia are both capable of being both submissive and rebellious, as when Desdemona has her “divided duty” (1.3.209) and Emilia rebels at the end, because their otherness is enacted, not simply their bodies. She is capable of enacting the roles that patriarchal society has defined for her, and still retaining a sense of self that is not defined by those roles. Othello, however, is not. His blackness is always visible, always readable, and always proof of his otherness. This is perhaps the play’s hardest lesson: that hybridity is a choice for some, a prison for others.

## **Conclusion**

Shakespeare’s Othello functions not only as a tragedy of individual vices, such as jealousy, but also as a multitude of identity issues, hybridity, power politics, and cultural alienation. Applying Homi K. Bhabha’s theoretical lenses of hybridity, mimicry, and third space, this play becomes part of the narrative through which the Venetian culture is seen to have tried to impose self-other dichotomies but is constantly subverted by the contradictions embedded in its discourse. A prominent outcome of the analysis is that Othello’s tragic downfall stems from Venetian society’s failure to adapt to hybrid identities. Othello represents the classic case of a Moor, a military general who is both an asset and an alien simultaneously. He tries to assimilate into society by speaking the Venetian language, adopting their culture, and even taking up the military’s way of life, yet he is incapacitated by the racial markers placed on him that prevent his existence from being humanly recognized. Iago’s slurs like “old black ram” (1.1.96) and the suggestion that Desdemona’s worth is only proportional to her whiteness reveal the dominance of white supremacist ideology. These depictions not only ridicule Othello but also suggest the existence of

a culture within which mimics are treated as a mark of ambivalence: Othello is forced to mimic the unquestionable standards of society, and yet, because of his difference, he can never belong fully; he always remains "almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 122). In addition, the worship of English cultural traits, such as the glorification of drinking when assessing one's superiority, deepens the whiteness of the global dominance pyramid. Iago's juxtaposing of cultural skills is yet another feature of a society that does not just stereotype but also rigidly maintains racial and cultural stereotypes. This sort of external alienation sets up an automatic system in which even those who are celebrated in the mainstream, Othello, for instance, in reality, suffer from the overwhelming impact of racial discrimination. Othello's tragedy is a consequence of societal unwillingness to accept the existence of a hybrid identity. As Fagehi argues, the third space is not merely a site of cultural hybridity but "a psychological arena itself," marked by "significant psychological burdens" that postcolonial criticism has often overlooked (5). The willful repetition of racism does not allow for any meaningful change or culture re-negotiation. This self-imposed limbo, somewhere between accepting and rejecting the Other, creates a volatile space that ultimately leads to the demise of Othello and all those caught up in his tragic web. Thus, Shakespearean tragedy goes beyond the confines of the Elizabethan era and accurately portrays the realities of multicultural societies, realities many face today. As Molla explains in her study of racial Othering, the act of "portraying the Other as essentially different" and "translating difference into stigma" destroys a person's ability to "appear in public without fear or shame" and undermines their "sense of belonging" (3-4). Venetian society does precisely this to Othello—not through personal malice alone, but through a systemic discourse that "creates, essentializes and targets" him as the racial Other (4). His tragedy is that he cannot escape this frame. Moreover, the paper argues that rigid binaries cross the racial divide to include gender and cultural ownership. The image of women, as in Desdemona's case, demonstrates how women in Venetian society shape the exercise of power within patriarchal structures. In a struggle between her will and her status as an object of male fantasy, Desdemona's position reflects the more significant conflict within the third space, and the same can be said of the other girls' situation in the play. The third space, meant for negotiating and reconstructing identities, is limited and controlled by the prevailing culture, which demands purity and rigid exclusion. As such, the combination of mimicry and hybridity shows how Othello and Desdemona are trapped in a system that controls identity through ascription to a singular, all-encompassing identity and decisive negation of any form of amalgamation or divergence (Gaydo 45–67). In reading *Othello* as an edge case for postcolonialism's central concepts, we need to rethink the concept of hybridity. Bhabha's third space is productive and free. However, *Othello* poses the question: Does hybridity, in certain circumstances, produce new forms of violence rather than new forms of possibility? Othello's tragedy is not one of being in between worlds; it is that the worlds cannot be in between. In fact, Bhabha himself acknowledges in the "Commitment to Theory" chapter that the productive capacities of the third space have "a colonial or postcolonial provenance" — the space is not neutral but always already marked by power (56). Yet what *Othello* reveals is that this very origin can turn the third space from a place of liberation into one of confinement: the productive ambiguity Bhabha describes becomes, for a subject whose hybridity is inscribed physically rather than performed discursively, a mechanism of entrapment. Bhabha's theory aims to "elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves" (56), but Othello demonstrates that when the body itself is the legible text of racial difference — when no discursive maneuver is available to escape it — the politics of polarity can never be fully eluded. This is the critical gap between Bhabha's theory and its Shakespearean application: the third space liberates identity from essentialism in language and performance, but Venetian society reads Othello's body as the

final, irrevocable sign that no cultural translation can override. Othello cautions against the easy celebration of hybridity and suggests that the third space is not necessarily one of growth but of destruction.

### Works Cited

- Abbas, Abbood Merwah, and Abbas Salim Hamad. "Reclaiming the Margins: A Postcolonial Reading of *An Island* by Karen Jennings." *Thi Qar Arts Journal*, vol. 3, no. 50, 2025, pp. 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.32792/tqartj.v3i50.830>.
- Arndt, Susan. "Trans\*textuality in William Shakespeare's Othello: Italian, West African, and English Encounters." *Anglia*, vol. 136, no. 3, 2018, pp. 395-428. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ang-2018-0045>.
- Bartels, Emily C. *Speaking of the Moor: From Alcazar to Othello*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008.
- Bhabha, Homi K. "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences." *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, Routledge, 1990, pp. 206-209.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2012.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 1999.
- Brown, D.L., et al. "The Relationship Between Black Women's Gendered Racial Socialization, Self-Evaluation, and Subjective Well-Being." *The Counseling Psychologist*, vol. 53, no. 7, 2025, pp. 984-1008.
- Callaghan, Dymna. *Shakespeare Without Women: Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage*. Routledge, 2000.
- Chojnacki, Stanley. *Women and Men in Renaissance Venice: Twelve Essays on Patrician Society*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.
- Corredera, Vanessa I. *Reanimating Shakespeare's Othello in Post-Racial America*. Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2022.
- Fagehi, Nehad Ali Y. *The Psychology of the Third Space*. 2024. University of Sydney, MA thesis.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Richard Philcox, Grove Press, 2008.
- Gaydo, Kyle. "In Defense of the 'Moor': Race, Racism, and Violence in Othello and O." *Locus: The Seton Hall Journal of Undergraduate Research*, vol. 4, no. 1, Oct. 2021. <https://doi.org/10.70531/2573-2749.1038>.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Hall, Kim F. *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England*. Cornell University Press, 1995.
- hooks, bell. *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*. Washington Square Press, 2004.
- Huang, A.X., and J. Degner. "What It Means to Be 'Mixed': Social Identity Typology in Persons With Multiple Racial-Ethnic Group Memberships." *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cdp0000792>.
- Innes, Paul. "Rank Intersectionality and Othello." *Multicultural Shakespeare: Translation, Appropriation and Performance*, vol. 30, no. 45, Dec. 2024, pp. 73-89. <https://doi.org/10.18778/2083-8530.30.05>.
- Istiak, Ashik, and Md. Rezaul Karim. "Identity and Alterity in The Merchant of Venice and in The Tempest: A Comparison." *Green University Review of Social Sciences*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2020, pp. 36-52.

- Jones et al. "Black Racial Identity and Engagement During Black Lives Matter 2020." *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2026, pp. 38–50.
- Koleva, Laura. "Conduct Literature, Pauline Christianity, and Othello's Disobedient Women." *Christianity & Literature*, vol. 74, no. 4, Dec. 2025, pp. 446-65.
- Loomba, Ania. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. Routledge, 1998.
- . *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama*. Manchester UP, 1989.
- . *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism*. Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Matheson, Mark. "Venetian Culture and the Politics of Othello." *Shakespeare Survey*, vol. 49, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 123-34. <https://doi.org/10.1017/ccol0521550300.010>.
- McClintock, Anne. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. Routledge, 1995.
- Molla, Tebeje. "Racial Othering and Relational Wellbeing: African Refugee Youth in Australia." *Social Sciences*, vol. 12, no. 11, 2023, p. 609. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12110609>.
- Moosavinia, Sayyed Rahim, and Sayyede Maryam Hosseini. "Liminality, Hybridity and 'Third Space': *Bessie Head's A Question of Power*." *Neohelicon*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2017, pp. 333-349.
- Neill, Michael. "Unproper Beds: Race, Adultery, and the Hideous in Othello." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 4, 1989, pp. 383-412. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2870608>.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. 25th anniversary ed., Vintage Books, 2014.
- Scott, Joan Wallach. *Gender and the Politics of History*. Columbia University Press, 1988.
- Shakespeare, William. *Othello*. Edited by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine, Folger Shakespeare Library, [https://folger-main-site-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2022/11/othello\\_PDF\\_FolgerShakespeare.pdf](https://folger-main-site-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2022/11/othello_PDF_FolgerShakespeare.pdf). Accessed 11 Mar. 2026.
- Shalini, and Ajoy Batta. "Traversing Third Space: Analyzing Global Identity, Colonialism, and Hybridity Through a Bhabhaian Lens in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Admiring Silence*." *Journal of East-West Thought*, vol. 14, no. 4, Dec. 2024, pp. 61-74.
- Singh, Jyotsna. "Othello's Identity, Postcolonial Theory, and Contemporary African Rewritings of Othello." *Women, "Race," and Writing in the Early Modern Period*, edited by Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker, 1st ed., Routledge, 1994, pp. 286-299. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203388891>.
- Vitkus, Daniel. "Othello, Islam, and the Noble Moor: Spiritual Identity and the Performance of Blackness on the Early Modern Stage." *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Religion*, edited by Beatrice Groves, Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 218-33. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316779224.014>.