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*Title*

**The Sentiment of Honour in William  
Shakespeare's Mediterranean Play  
*Othello* (1602): A Sociological  
Approach.**

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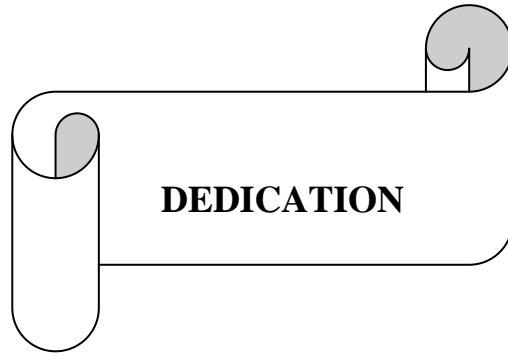
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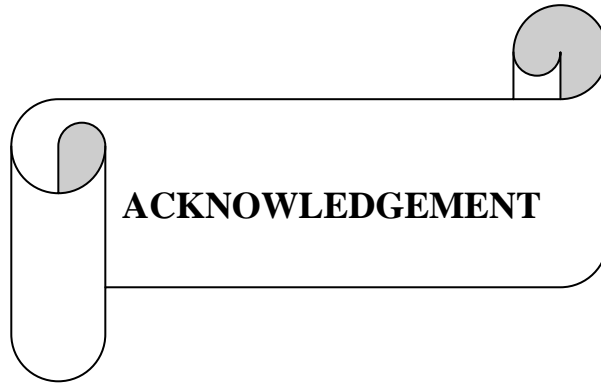
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I dedicate this modest work to my parents, my two sisters and brother.  
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## Abstract

*This dissertation studies the sentiment of honour in William Shakespeare's Mediterranean play **Othello: the Moor of Venice** (1602). It aims to demonstrate the way Shakespeare regards honour as it is perceived in the Mediterranean societies. Borrowing the analytic tools from Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theory developed in his book **Masculine Domination** (1998), this research paper tries to analyse two fundamental types of honour namely: male honour and female honour. My analysis has shown that though **Othello** was written by an Englishman, the way Shakespeare manoeuvres the sentiment of honour demonstrates that he knows much about the Mediterranean codes of honour. Through Othello's reaction towards chastity, it appeared that it does not reflect an Anglo-Saxon attitude, but a purely Mediterranean one.*

## Introduction

The following dissertation suggests a study of the sentiment of honour in William Shakespeare's *Othello: the Moor of Venice* (1602). Shakespeare emerged during the Renaissance Era between the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries when Europe was greatly influenced by "a rebirth of interest in Greek and Latin Learning and experienced a flowering of literature and the arts."<sup>1</sup> In England, the Renaissance did not truly begin until the late sixteenth century during the time when Elizabeth I ascended the throne. During her reign, Queen Elizabeth I was labelled as "a great patron of arts"<sup>2</sup> because it was at that time that English literature became most successful and powerful. Indeed, since Shakespeare emerged during this flowering age, he staged several plays which reflected the spirit of the English Renaissance.

Among the themes that Shakespeare depicted in his plays: love, betrayal, jealousy, faith, race, war and honour etc... Many critics have recognized that honour is a major thematic concern in almost all Shakespeare's plays. For instance, Thomas, Mowbray, the Duke of Norfolk in Shakespeare's play *Richard II*, declares that "Mine honour is my life; both grow in one; / Take my honour from me, and my life is done."<sup>3</sup>

During the Renaissance, the concept of honour was not only used in Shakespeare's works, but also in many other plays, pamphlets, conduct books and popular literature. C.L. Barber found over two hundred plays written between 1591 and 1700 which referred to honour.<sup>4</sup> C.B. Watson's study in contemporary philosophy and Shakespeare's drama has led him to conclude that men at that time were "intoxicated" with honour and "outward" repute.<sup>5</sup> So, the concept of honour played a crucial role in the life of the Renaissance men. Besides, for the Renaissance men, the sense of honour was an excellent sentiment in every respect which should never be questioned. As Du Vain observed: "True honour is the glittering and beaming

brightness of a good and virtuous action, which rebounds from our consciences unto the sight of them with whom we live, and so by a reflection in ourselves, brings us a testimonie from others of the good opinion which they have on us, which makes us to enjoy great comfort of minde.”<sup>6</sup>

In this respect, it is important to mention that the “concept of honour” differed from men to women. Hence, to gain honour men and women had to adopt and display behaviours and roles which were approved for their gender. “Honour of a man and that of a woman...imply quite different conduct.”<sup>7</sup> For instance, a woman’s honour in the sixteenth century consisted in the preservation of her virginity as long as she was unmarried and in her faithfulness to her husband after marriage. As opposed to female honour, it has been argued that male honour in early modern period was not affected by sexual behaviour. Unlike women, men could lie, cheat, deceive, plot and commit adultery without losing their honour.

Additionally, honour, as a fundamental principle that shaped everyday attitudes and behaviours, “has also been proved to be the consequence in many other early modern Mediterranean countries including France, Spain, and Germany...etc.”<sup>8</sup> Honour in the Mediterranean societies meant the way a person saw himself and the way a society regarded him. According to Pitt-Rivers, “honour is his estimation of his own worth, his claim to pride.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, while surveying ancient cultures, scholars discovered that the most prominent value system of the Mediterranean culture is honour.

## Review of the Literature

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) stands out above all other writers in English literature. His plays have stimulated the interest of critics all along centuries since their publication. The publication of these plays took place in a period of seventeen years, spanning both the Elizabethan and Jacobean Eras.

Among the most representative critics of Shakespeare's plays, one can cite A.C. Bradley. In his *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1911), Bradley considers Shakespeare's *Othello*: "as the most painfully exciting and the most terrible. From the moment when the temptation of the hero begins, the reader's heart and mind are held in a vice, experiencing the extremes of pity and fear, sympathy and repulsion, sickening hope and dreadful expectation."<sup>10</sup> In his *Lecture on Othello*, he explains that the sexual jealousy is the most exciting subject that caused Othello's suffering, and drove him to commit a crime which is considered a hidden blunder. For Bradley, jealousy, especially, sexual jealousy, brings with it a sense of humiliation and shame. It is for this reason that this kind of jealousy is generally hidden because as Bradley states: "if we perceive jealousy we ourselves are ashamed and turn our eyes away, and when it is hidden it commonly stirs contempt as well as pity."<sup>11</sup> Such a jealousy, like the one of Othello's, transforms human nature into chaos and disorder, and liberates the beast in man. According to Bradley, sexual jealousy is the most painful feeling that a noble and honourable man can not deliberately deny. Although Bradley describes Othello as simple, Othello describes himself as "one not easily jealous, but, being wrought, perplexed in the extreme."<sup>12</sup> In fact, Othello's tragedy is built upon his jealousy. Bradley argues that "Othello's whole nature was indisposed to jealousy, and yet was such that he was usually open to deception."<sup>13</sup> He adds that Othello's jealousy is not related to his belonging to the Moors, who have "savage passion" and who regard female chastity in a suspicious way,



but he thinks that Othello is a man who keeps his honour integral. “Othello is a man who does not act like a barbarian, but like a man who, though wrought almost to madness, does all in honour.”<sup>14</sup>

Another piece of criticism about Shakespeare’s *Othello* is Edward Meryon Wilson’s critical essay “A Hispanist looks at *Othello*” (1980). In his essay, E.M. Wilson develops the Spanish theory to examine *Othello* in the light of the Spanish code of honour. According to him, a man’s honour depends on the behaviour of his womenfolk. A man whose womenfolk’s commit adultery, deprive not only their husband, brother or father of their honour but themselves of their honour. Wilson states that: “if a man was to remove the dishonour of cuckoldry, he had to kill her and her lover; only by so doing could he become honourable again in the eyes of his fellows.”<sup>15</sup> He argues that Othello kills Desdemona because he believes that she has committed adultery with Cassio. If Desdemona had really destroyed Othello’s honour with her supposed revolt, his honour might be restored only by killing her. In fact, Wilson believes that Othello’s tragedy is partly the consequence of his belief in honour. He argues that “Othello thought he was dishonoured when he was a man of honour; he dishonoured himself by insulting and killing his innocent wife.”<sup>16</sup>

Another influential critic of Shakespeare’s works is Ewan Fernie’s *Shame in Shakespeare* (2002). In his book, he explains that *Othello* is a play built upon the notion of shame. He argues that “despite tradition, it is shame not jealousy that is the signal and unifying passion of *Othello*.”<sup>17</sup> He also writes that Harold Bloom in his *Ruin the Sacred Truths* observes that Othello’s “name in fact becomes jealousy.”<sup>18</sup> The critic asserts that it is true that Othello is undoubtedly jealous, but though he thinks about Desdemona and her imagined adultery, his most vehement feeling is that he was himself been degraded and defiled. In other words, the soul of Othello’s jealousy is shame. In his account, he adds that: “shame, more than jealousy, spreads like a disease through this play and jealousy is not so

much begotten on itself as also bred out of shame.”<sup>19</sup> According to Fernie, the reaction of Iago towards Othello is related to shame. Iago feels ashamed and slighted rather than envious when Othello promotes Cassio over him. In fact, the reason why Iago persuades Othello that Desdemona betrays him is to pay back shame with shame. Even Othello’s reaction towards Desdemona is related to shame.

In addition and from a postcolonial feminist perspective, Ania Loomba’s “*Shakespeare and Cultural Difference*” (1998) deals with race as an analytical category in Elizabethan and Jacobean England through Shakespeare’s plays. She remarks that race and cultural difference have belatedly become central issues of Shakespeare’s *Othello*. She argues that *Othello* is both a fantasy of interracial love and social toleration, and a nightmare of racial hatred and male violence.<sup>20</sup> Loomba states that: “in *Othello*, a white woman flouts the established social hierarchies of clime, complexion and degree to marry a black man, an act that betrays, in the eyes of some beholders, foul disproportions, and thoughts unnatural.”<sup>21</sup> Besides, she declares that location, skin colour, and class seem to add up to ‘nature’ itself. She believes that the real tragedy of the play lies in the fact that these hierarchies are not external to the pair. In fact, Loomba claims that Iago’s plan is effective because Othello is predisposed to believe his pronouncements about the inherent duplicity of women. In addition, Loomba argues that “both blacks and Muslims were regarded as given to unnatural sexual and domestic practices, as highly emotional and ever irrational, and prone to anger and jealousy.”<sup>22</sup> She explains that the principle reason of Othello’s attitudes towards Desdemona is due to the fact that he is a Black and a Muslim.

Furthermore, Maria Luisa Danabeitia in her “*the Inevitable Death of Desdemona: Shakespeare and the Mediterranean Tradition*” (1992) deals with the literary impact of an archaic preoccupation of honour and reputation. In her article, she compares Shakespeare’s treatment of the problem of honour with that of Calderon de la Barca who is a famous

playwright in the Spanish Literature. She argues that the preoccupation of honour and reputation is almost omnipresent in many cultures, but not every culture solves issues involving the injured honour of an individual, or that of family, or a clan, in an identical manner. She observes that the way Shakespeare describes Othello who is a husband who cares a lot about his marital honour resembles any husband described by Calderon de la Barca in his plays. She asserts that Shakespeare has chosen to set his play in Venice because he knows that in such societies men have the same reactions towards adultery.

## Issue and Working Hypothesis

In my review of literature about Shakespeare's *Othello*, we noticed that the critics have limited their analyses to the related concepts of honour such as jealousy and shame. It is clear that jealousy plays an important part in the play and that it is applicable to a man who is convinced of his wife's unfaithfulness, but to regard jealousy as the main subject of the whole play is to misunderstand the play. A.C. Bradley in his lecture on *Othello* remarks that sexual jealousy is the subject upon which the play is built, but as it will be shown through my analysis it is rather honour which is the central reason of *Othello*'s jealousy.

The aim of the present research paper, therefore, is to deal with the sentiment of honour in William Shakespeare's *Othello* from Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theory where he analyses the "concept of honour" as regarded in the Mediterranean societies. In his sociological approach, Bourdieu considers the concept of honour as an objective structuring principle of the social and political order, which is inscribed in the agent's mind as means of maintaining the social and political order of things.<sup>23</sup> He argues that honour is a cultural tradition that played the largest role in the Mediterranean society, and that the whole European cultural domain definitely shares in the same tradition.<sup>24</sup> The idea explains why Shakespeare has chosen to set his play in a Mediterranean society to depict the sentiment of honour.

My intention is to explore the way Shakespeare uses the sentiment of honour as the main value that shapes everyday attitudes and behaviours. Even though *Othello: the Moor of Venice* was written by an Englishman, the way he regards honour shows that he had sufficient information about the Mediterranean code of honour. I will try to show how the idea of honour is used by Shakespeare according to the Mediterranean perception of the sentiment of honour.

It can be a mistake to state that Shakespeare regarded honour in the same way as does the Mediterranean, but when it comes to Othello's reaction and behaviour towards chastity, it seems obvious that it does not reflect an attitude of an Englishman, but that of a Mediterranean one. As it has been argued by Pierre Bourdieu, women and men gained honour by adopting and displaying behaviours or roles which were approved for their gender. He emphasises on the idea that female honour was based on sexual purity or chastity whereas male honour was complex, and based far more on non sexual behaviour.<sup>25</sup> In other words, contrary to female honour, male honour could be unaffected by sexual behaviour.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Laurie Skiba, *Othello the Moor of Venice* (USA: EMC/ Paradigm, 2004), 16.
- <sup>2</sup> Skiba, *Othello*, 25.
- <sup>3</sup> William Shakespeare, *Richard II* (London: Penguin, 1996), I, i, 182-183.
- <sup>4</sup> C.L. Barber, *the Ideal of Honour in the English Drama 1591-1700* (Goteborg, 1957).
- <sup>5</sup> C.B. Watson, *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honour* (Princeton: Princeton university press, 1960), 10.
- <sup>6</sup> Watson, *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honour*, 10.
- <sup>7</sup> Pitt-Rivers J, *Honour and Shame* (London, 1966), 46.
- <sup>8</sup> R.A. Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp 1-17.
- <sup>9</sup> Pitt-Rivers, *Honour and Social Status* (Chicago: Sunny Times Press, 1966), 1.
- <sup>10</sup> A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lecture on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth* (USA: library of Alexandria, 1991), 168.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.
- <sup>15</sup> Edward Meryon Wilson, 'a Hispanist looks at Othello', in *Spanish and English literature of the 16<sup>TH</sup> and 17<sup>TH</sup> centuries: Studies in Dissertation, Illusion and Mutability* (USA: Cambridge University press, 1980), 202.
- <sup>16</sup> Wilson, *a Hispanist looks at Othello*, 212.
- <sup>17</sup> Ewane Fernie, *Shame in Shakespeare: Accent on Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 2002), 136.
- <sup>18</sup> Harold Bloom, *Ruin in the Sacred Truths* (London, Routledge, 1989), 66.
- <sup>19</sup> Fernie, *Shame in Shakespeare*, 137.
- <sup>20</sup> Ania Loomba, 'Shakespeare and Cultural Difference', in *Alternative Shakespeare*, (ed.) Terence Hawkes (London: Routledge, 1998), Vol 2, 90.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.
- <sup>23</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University press, 2001), 11.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

## Chapter I

### Method and Materials

#### I- The Method

The purpose of this section is to explore Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theory developed in his book entitled *Masculine Domination* (1998). I intend to look for key theoretical elements which will help me discuss the sentiment of honour in *Othello*. In his book, Bourdieu analyses the "pervasive" and "insidious power" of masculine domination. For him, this domination is done subtly through what he calls 'symbolic violence', a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims. Even though Bourdieu describes symbolic violence as gentle, it is considered as the most powerful weapon in masculine domination since it creates either economic or physical violence. To make Bourdieu's ideas accord to with William Shakespeare's *Othello: the Moor of Venice*, some of his basic concepts are appropriate to deal with the issue of honour in the play.

Among Bourdieu's concepts which can be applied to Shakespeare's *Othello* is the notion of "honour" in its ethical aspect. He considers honour as the major value structuring the social and political order of a Mediterranean androcentric societies. Bourdieu argues that honour is the product of social labour which is inculcated in the agent's minds as means of maintaining the social order.<sup>26</sup> Bourdieu chooses Kabylia as a particular case of study because he believes that "the cultural tradition that has been maintained there constitutes a paradigmatic realization of the Mediterranean tradition, and that the whole European culture domain undeniably shares in the same tradition."<sup>27</sup> To extend further his argument, Bourdieu gives the example of the question of honour and shame which are perceived similarly in various Mediterranean societies such as Italy, Spain, Turkey, Kabylia...etc.

Moreover, Bourdieu argues that in Kabyle society, sexual differences remain immersed in the set of oppositions that organize the whole cosmos, and that sexual attributes and acts are charged with anthropological and cosmological determinations. He adds that all the movements and displacements of individuals are immediately related to social meaning.<sup>28</sup> For example, “upwards movement” is associated only with the male because he is considered as being a leader or the dominant. In *Othello*, Shakespeare uses male characters as the dominant figures of the play, and this consideration is demonstrated through Othello as he is placed at the top of the army. For Bourdieu, the division of things and activities whether sexual or not are divided according to male and female oppositions. Thus, all that is up, above, right...etc is associated with men, and all that is down, below, left is associated with women. In other words, all these movements determine the position of a man and that of a woman.<sup>29</sup> In *Othello*, we see that male characters are always outside doing their duty and women remain inside the house as householders.

Furthermore, Bourdieu uses other concepts such as “the order of things” to explain that the division between the sexes “is present in the objectified states-in things (in the house for example in which everything is sexed), in the whole social world, in the embodied state and in the habitus of the agents, which functions as a system of schemes of perceptions, thought and action.”<sup>30</sup> Additionally, Bourdieu’s suggestions of women’s participation in their own domination are found in his concept of habitus. Habitus for Bourdieu, “names the characteristic dispositions of the social subject. It is the indication in the bearing of the body (hexis), and deeply ingrained habits of behaviour, feeling and thought.”<sup>31</sup> According to him, our social identities are neither imposed on us, nor voluntarily chosen, but rather acquired as a result of the experiment of living, an experiment that is not consciously undertaken, but rather coincident with the practical matter of living in a society.



The concepts of “manliness” and “virility” are other key theoretical elements that seem most appropriate to Shakespeare’s *Othello*. Bourdieu asserts that manliness and virility, in their ethical aspect, i.e. the point of honour, are very important because they are considered as the principle of the conservation and increase of honour. Within this context, we see that Shakespeare uses *Othello* as a man who always tries to prove his manliness both as a military man and a lover to maintain his public and personal honour. In addition, Bourdieu argues that to possess sexually, is to dominate in the sense of subjecting to one’s power but also to deceive, mislead, or, to have. Thus, the manifestation of virility, whether legitimate or illegitimate, belongs to the logic of prowess, the exploit which confers honour. According to Bourdieu, it is men and men only that can have and obtain honour, and women are inherently shameful and outside the societal approval and award. Within Shakespeare’s *Othello*, we notice that men are the only ones who are struggling to protect their reputation and honour while women are constantly viewed as whores and prostitutes. Bourdieu argues that women are part of the territory that must be defended in order to maintain male honour. He adds that manliness is perceived not only as sexual or social reproduction capacity, but also as the capacity to fight and to exercise violence, especially the act of revenge. This idea of violence and vengeful act can be well applied to Shakespeare’s *Othello* when the Moor discovers his wife’s supposed adultery.

Additionally, Bourdieu asserts that unlike a woman whose honour, especially the negative one, can only be defended or lost because her virtue is related to virginity and fidelity, a real man is someone who feels the need to rise to the challenge of the opportunities available to him to increase his honour by seeking glory and distinction in public sphere. This can be noticed through the way *Othello* tries to restore his lost honour by raising a challenge in order to become honourable again in the eyes of his fellows.

Finally, Bourdieu puts emphasis on the idea that male honour differs from female's, and that male honour in the Mediterranean societies depends on womenfolk. He states that "masculine honour is precariously balanced upon the actions of 'honourless' women"<sup>32</sup>; he means that honour in the Mediterranean countries is the reward for successful power in which a man's relationship to other men is evaluated through women. Bourdieu states that "in the Mediterranean societies, it is not shocking to see a man killing his wife for a supposed adultery". Thus, to assert that Shakespeare approaches the issue of honour exactly as the does the Mediterranean is a mistake, but when it comes to Othello's reasons for killing Desdemona, his attitude seems accurate.

## II- Materials

### Historical Background

Elizabeth's reign is referred to as the Elizabethan Era or the Golden Age of the English Renaissance. It is commonly referred to as a transitional period between the Middle Ages and Early Modernity. That period was considered the height of the English Renaissance because of its flowering literature, poetry and other arts.<sup>33</sup> My intention in this section is to introduce some of the social and cultural aspects that marked the Elizabethan Era. First, I will speak about the Renaissance concept of honour which is considered as the cultural tradition that played a crucial and significant role in the life of the Englishmen during the Elizabethan times. Then, I will deal with the position of the English women in their patriarchal system. Finally, I will move to the position of Moors in Renaissance England and the attitude of Queen Elizabeth I and the English society as a whole towards the black foreigners.

The Elizabethan Era witnessed the emergence of the Renaissance concept of honour. "The sense of honour, the desire for virtue, is deeply implanted in the soul of the Renaissance gentlemen."<sup>40</sup> In the Renaissance, honour was related to the intellectual faculties as well as to inner quality. As Robert Ashley in his *of Honour* concluded, "It is only when we look inside the dreary pages of Elizabethan ethical treatises and breathe into it the living fire with which it possessed the heart, soul and mind of the English gentleman that we can appreciate its real significance."<sup>41</sup> From this quotation we notice that the Elizabethan gentlemen were intoxicated with honour and outward repute.

The ideal Renaissance gentleman was a man of integrity and honesty. In fact, honour and honesty were interchangeable in the Renaissance, "by definition it seems that honour and honesty are inseparable."<sup>42</sup> Curtis Watson maintains that the man who has lost his credit, i.e. honesty and integrity, has no more to lose because the welfare and honour of a man depend

upon them.”<sup>43</sup> The Renaissance gentleman was concerned not only with his personal honour, which consisted on preserving his honour and that of his family, but with his public honour as well. “The public display of honour, respect and esteem are expressions of high regard to those superior in rank or virtue, was generally considered by the Renaissance moralists as one of the most aspect of one’s duties to god, to the country as well as to one’s fellow men.”<sup>44</sup>

Moreover, the Renaissance gentlemen were greatly concerned with their reputation. Reputation for them was as precious as life because dishonour and shame were the only things in life which could not be tolerated. No crime was so worse in the eyes of the Renaissance gentleman than that which deprived another man of his honour. To deprive a man of his life would not ruin his reputation and credit among his fellows, but to dirt his honour in any way might affect the opinion of the community towards him.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, it has been argued that adultery was a much worse than theft because the adulterer is a “grievous injurier or destroyer of another man’s honour.”<sup>46</sup>

In the Renaissance, the concept of honour was not only applied on men, but on women as well. A woman’s honour in the sixteenth century consisted primarily of the preservation of her virginity as long as she was unmarried, and of her faithfulness to her husband after marriage.<sup>47</sup> The Renaissance woman could lose her honour and reputation only by losing her sexual purity. More importantly, revenge for adultery, by the murder of both the wife and the adulterer was tolerated in the early laws of every European country.<sup>48</sup> It is obvious from here that the obsessive concern of the Renaissance man to preserve his honour at no matter cost is apparent. In the Mediterranean countries, Italy in particular, the betrayal of a husband’s honour by an erring wife was a justified cause for murder which was accepted by public opinion. Thus, since honour was dearer than life, “the taking of the wife’s life for bringing dishonour on her husband and family was considered a lesser wrong than the injury which she had done to him.”<sup>49</sup>

The position of women during the Elizabethan Era did not change a lot from what it had been under the first Tudor monarchies. In the Renaissance period, women were “hidden from history” as Anne Laurence puts it in *Women in England 1500-1760*, and adds that “history books are shaped by the passage of men’s lives; men’s lives are dynamic and women’s are passive.”<sup>34</sup> During the Elizabethan Era, the English society was extremely patriarchal, which means that the fathers have all the rights on their children, especially on their daughters, and the husbands over their wives. Indeed, a woman’s life at that time was a continuous lesson in submission. She was forced to conform patiently and silently to the will of her father, and later to that of her husband. An Elizabethan ideal woman was to be chaste, silent and obedient.<sup>35</sup> Camden Carroll states: “decency, humility and silence were to be good qualifications for Elizabethan women.”<sup>36</sup>

More importantly, women at that time demonstrated an extreme filial obedience by accepting the husbands that their fathers chose for them in order to transfer their allegiance from one father figure to another. Juan Luis Vives concluded “yet the woman is as daughter unto her husband and of nature more weaker. And therefore she needeth his ayde and succour.”<sup>37</sup> In addition during the Renaissance, men were praised for noble deeds, accomplishments as well as virtuous actions while women won praise for passive and submissive behaviour. Hence, Elizabethan women were led to believe that they were inferior to men. The church too believed that women should be obedient and passive and quoted the Bible in order to ensure the continued adherence to the principle of women’s inferiority. The principle leader John Knox wrote: “women in greatest perfection were made to serve and obey men.”<sup>38</sup>

Women were totally dominated by the male members of their families. They were expected to obey not only their fathers but also their brothers and any other male members of the family. Once married, the wife should always obey her husband in everything. In fact, an Elizabethan married woman lived in a continuous state of anxiety, solicitous to please her lord and fearful of his displeasure. If her husband misbehaved or reproached her unjustly, a wife's only solution was patience. A good wife was the one who must never become angry with her husband even if he mistreated her, "she shun all violence of rage, passion, and humour, covering less direct that to be directed, appearing ever unto him pleasant, amiable and delightful."<sup>39</sup> Moreover, during the Elizabethan Era, virginity and chastity were seen as women's precious treasures. Just like youth and beauty, virginity was considered as a physical condition that women from all social classes should preserve to preserve their family honour.

Likewise, during the Elizabethan Era England witnessed cross-cultural encounters with several races among them the black Moors. Historians and other researchers situate traces of Moors in the British Isles before the Elizabethan Era. Although the Moorish presence was limited to a very restrained number of man and women, their existence within the English society cannot be denied. In fact, the Tudor period was a significant Era for black settlement in England. In 1501, for example, it was said that Catherine of Aragon landed at Deptford with a multinational and a multicultural entourage of Moors and Muslims descendants of those who settled in Spain since the eighth century.<sup>50</sup>

Besides black Moors from Spain and North Africa, in Elizabethan times Black people began to arrive as a result of the slave trade as interpreters, soldiers, sailors and servants. In fact, Black Moors in the midst of the sixteenth century arrived exclusively as a result of England's expeditionary forays to Africa and the Western Atlantic in search of new commodities and markets. Between 1558 and 1603, records of black Moors were comparatively much greater than in the previous century.<sup>51</sup> Also, the accession of Elizabeth I

to the English throne in 1558 marked the beginning of a period that saw a radical increase in the number of black Moors in England. Imtiaz Habib explains that “the growth of black Moors in Elizabeth’s rule happened not because her government wanted their importation, but because its support of such activity was expedient and evasive.”<sup>52</sup> Thus, unlike that of the earlier period, the history of Black Moors in Elizabeth’s reign was unconnected to affairs of state. Additionally, though they were in great number compared to the previous century, “they were seen but denied, known but unacknowledged, and more present than before but just as invisibles.”<sup>53</sup> Moors were described as sub-born, bestial and intolerant. To Elizabethan Londoners, Moors or Africans in general were viewed as barbaric.

When Elizabeth I saw that there was an excessive number of Moors who settled in England living peacefully, carrying on different types of professions and trade, and contributing to every fabric of society as they had always done in England since centuries, earlier, she decided to manifest virtually against them. Therefore, to reduce the number of black Moors, Elizabeth promulgated the expulsion of the Moors of England from the land of their birth. Hence, in 1596 she wrote to the Lord Mayors of major cities noting that there were “of late divers black Moors brought into this realm, of which kind of people there are already here to manie..., she then ordered that “ those kinde of people should be sente forth of the land.”<sup>54</sup> Elizabeth made an arrangement for a merchant, Casper Van Senden, to deport Moors from England. In 1596, she licensed him to deport at least eighty nine black people to Spain and Portugal.

Moreover, Elizabeth made a further proclamation expressing her “discontentment by the number of black Moors who are crept into this realm...”<sup>55</sup> the second proclamation was issued because Elizabeth and the society as a whole were afraid of the spread of bad qualities that the Moors consisted of such as passion, savagery, violence, rape...etc. As a consequence,

this second proclamation of 1601 deepened the prejudice and hatred towards black Moors by the Elizabethan society.

## Endnotes

<sup>26</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 11.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-9.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-41.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-57.

<sup>33</sup> William Harison, *Description of Elizabethan England* (London: Sundry kinds of publishment, 1577), 67.

<sup>34</sup> Anne Laurence, *Women in England: 1500-1760* (London: Phoenix Press, 1996), 4.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>37</sup> Diane Elizabeth Dreher, *Domination and Defiance: Fathers and Daughter in Shakespeare* (Kentucky: Kentucky University Press, 1986), 6.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>40</sup> Watson, *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honour*, 91.

<sup>41</sup> Robert Ashley, *of Honour* (Huntington Library, 1947), 24.

<sup>42</sup> Watson, *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honour*, 94.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>45</sup> Barber, *the idea of Honour in the English Drama*, 54.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>47</sup> Norman. Council, *When Honour at Stake: Ideas of Honour in Shakespeare's plays* (London: Allan and Unwin, 1973), 11-14.

<sup>48</sup> J.G. Peristiany, ed., *Honour and Shame: the Values of Mediterranean Societies* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965), 13.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.



<sup>50</sup> Peter Fryer, *Staying Power : the History of Black People in Bratain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), 45.

<sup>51</sup> Habib Imtiaz, *Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500-1677: Imprints of the Invisible* (USA: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008), 64.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>54</sup> McDonald Russ, 'Elizabeth's Edicts Concerning Black-a-Moor' in the Bradford Company to Shakespeare (New York: Penguin, 1996), 17

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

## Chapter II

### Male honour

Honour...is so near a neighbour unto man's life, that he is ever accounted cruel to himself, that is careless of his reputation, for dishonour is more to be feared than death, and honour more to be desired than life.<sup>56</sup>

The code of honour was fundamental in many early modern societies. Anthropologists who surveyed ancient cultures, particularly the Mediterranean, have found that principles of honour and shame were fundamental in shaping everyday attitudes and behaviours. A man of honour required that he should be loyal to his prince, that he should stand on his dignity; that he should protect the weak, fulfil his promises and so forth. "Honour as an ethical aspect was as precious as life and some believed that it was more precious."<sup>57</sup>

The concept of honour has two distinct meanings which have to be distinguished from each other. Honour, on the one hand is an exclusively social virtue. In this sense, "honour may refer to one's reputation in the community, to one's credit as a man of integrity as well as to the honours and rewards which are bestowed publicly as a testimony to one's virtue."<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, honour refers to one's private and personal judgement of one's own actions as well as to one's inner conviction of innate moral goodness. In other words, honour relates to self-esteem and respect and also to public good opinion. This private honour is the one which is the most equated with virtue. As opposed to public honour, honour in its private sense is an indisputable and priceless possession of which a man cannot be deprived by any other person.<sup>59</sup> As I have already mentioned, honour in its second meaning has to do with honour as status and reputation, and this is the focus of the present chapter. In fact, this kind of honour is more narrowly emphasized in certain cultures such as the Mediterranean ones. "Honour in the Mediterranean societies is fragile and precarious; it could be lost by the direct lie or by a physical blow."<sup>60</sup> As Albert Camus said, "Honour is considered as a smoke that can easily

blow away”.<sup>61</sup> According to the Mediterranean Code of Honour, a key component of the masculine reputation is the good name of a man’s female partner. Thus, women’s chastity, purity and modesty are valuable in the Mediterranean societies in such a way that they preserve men’s honour as well as that of family.<sup>62</sup> As emphasized in an Arab expression that a man’s honour “lies between the legs of a woman”.<sup>63</sup>

There are many elements that could affect both honour and reputation, but in this chapter I am concerned only with one specific type of honour: that which is related to the behaviour of a woman. This type of honour, in fact, involves both men and women because the honour and the good name of a man depend on the behaviour of his wife, his mother, or even his own sister.<sup>64</sup> To be a man whose honour has been stained by the sexual behaviour of a woman, who is related to him, is not something trivial. In this situation, it is the society, not the law, which will perceive him as a weak and vulnerable man incapable of watching over his family’s female honour and reputation. Hence, the man has a difficult task since he must observe not only the sexual behaviour of his wife, if he has one, but that of his family’s women.<sup>65</sup> As a consequence, the man is obliged to kill a human being he loves because she has broken an implicit and important principle that all Mediterranean men should maintain. To neglect this duty, however, means that a man risks himself of being labelled as an unworried husband, or as a man who accepts dishonour and shame. Pitt- Rivers wrote about infidelity in cultures of honour: “woman’s adultery represents not only an infringement of a man’s rights but the demonstration of failure in his duty”.<sup>66</sup> So, for a man of honour, this type of aggression becomes an intolerable insult.

The Mediterranean honour and shame culture finds nothing shocking in a husband taking the life of his wife for a supposed crime of adultery especially when the wronged man is not one of their own, i.e. someone who does not belong to the same culture and beliefs.<sup>67</sup> In England, for instance, there were no clear solutions for the lost honour as there was in the

Mediterranean societies. It is true that cuckoldry was a serious preoccupation both in England and in the Mediterranean societies; however, the way they solve the problem differs from one another. The Mediterranean attitude is harsh and without pity whereas the English one is less precise.<sup>68</sup> It means that the way a Mediterranean man solves the injured honour differ from a Westerner one.

In the pages that follow, I will try to examine and analyse William Shakespeare's *Othello: the Moor of Venice* (1604) in the light of the Mediterranean Code of Honour as it has been perceived by Pierre Bourdieu in his sociological theory *Masculine Domination*. A few assumptions underlie the argument. One is that the Mediterranean Code of Honour is perceived as the value that plays the largest role in Mediterranean societies. Another is that a man's honour largely consists in his womenfolk's conduct, and that a man's relationship to other men is evaluated through the sexual behaviour of a woman who is either related to him by blood ties, or by the bond of matrimony. As Bourdieu states: "masculine honour is precariously balanced upon the actions of honourless women."<sup>69</sup> Another important thing is that, as Bourdieu claims, a man who gives importance to his good name and reputation uses violence, especially the act of revenge in order to restore his lost honour and becomes honourable again in the eyes of his fellows.<sup>70</sup>

In the case of *Othello* the death of Desdemona is not only inevitable, but a necessary ordeal Othello has to undergo in order to restore his good name, and that of his family. Because, as I have already mentioned, a man in the Mediterranean culture whose wife or sister commits adultery deprives not only herself of her honour, but her husband and family of their honour as well. The only way to restore honour to the family is by killing the person responsible for its loss, i.e. the woman and her lover.

When Shakespeare wrote *Othello: the Moor of Venice*, he had certainly learnt about the Mediterranean Code of Honour because when we look at the attitude of Othello towards chastity, we find that it equals any Mediterranean man. We cannot say that Shakespeare views the issue of honour exactly as does the Mediterranean societies, but when it comes to main character's reasons for killing Desdemona, it becomes obvious that he has been correct. Indeed, Othello is a man who, according to his cultural background, behaves in an accurate way. Since he has proofs which confirm Desdemona's unfaithfulness, he is convinced that he must kill her. In fact, the protagonist thinks this way because as a Moor he has to react according to his traditional behaviour and belief. The fact that he is a Black Moor, who is by nature suspicious about female chastity and who does not trust women easily, explains well his attitude towards his wife.<sup>71</sup> "When it comes to women's infidelity, men become like beasts who react in savage passion with revengeful and vindictive spirit."<sup>72</sup> Thus, Othello's reaction and behaviour does not reflect an Anglo-Saxon attitude towards chastity, but a Mediterranean one. He kills Desdemona because he believes she has committed adultery with Cassio. He believes that his honour as a married man has been compromised by her conduct. As I have mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, a man's honour was as precious as life itself. "If blood called for blood, dishonour called for blood too".<sup>73</sup> If Desdemona has really destroyed her husband's honour, which depends upon her demeanour, and then as honour is considered so precious, his honour could be restored only by killing her. In this way Othello's attitude seems to reflect the attitude of the Mediterranean.

The Venetian society honours and respects Othello. As a Moor, he has a unique reputation. As I have mentioned in the first chapter, during the Elizabethan Era people did not consider Moors in high regard because they were generally viewed as villains, foreign enemies and savages. In the literature of that time as well as in real life, these African descendants were regarded with suspicion and hostility. Even Queen Elizabeth wanted to expel the Black Moors

because she did not want an excessive number of them in her realm. Her hate for the Moors is expressed as follows:

Her Majesty understanding that several black Moors have already lately brought into this realm; of which kind of people there are already too many here...her Majesty's pleasure therefore is that those kind of people should be expelled from the land.<sup>74</sup>

The above quotation demonstrates clearly that the Moors did not hold high positions in Elizabethan society. Othello's reputation, however, differs completely from this norm. His status as a military hero earns him an esteemed position in the English society. Hence, the Duke and the citizens of Venice overlook his offences. For example, when Desdemona's father Brabantio demands that the Duke punishes the man who has eloped with his daughter, the Duke seems outraged and promises Brabantio that he can choose the man's punishment. However, when the Duke learns that Othello married Desdemona, his view of justice changes.

The Duke justifies his change of mind as follows:

The Moor, howbe't that I endure him not,  
Is of a constant, loving, noble nature,  
And I dare think he'll prove to Desdemona  
A most dear husband.<sup>75</sup>

From the quotation we understand that Othello's essential role in the military outweighs Brabantio's desires. It demonstrates that the Duke admires Othello's noble nature and thinks that his elopement with Desdemona is a noble and loving proof of his love to his wife.

Furthermore, the Duke tells Brabantio that: "if virtue no delighted beauty lack, your son in law is far more fair than black."<sup>76</sup> Here the Duke compares Othello to an honourable white man. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, as admired critic of Shakespeare's works, agrees with the Duke when he asserts that "Othello must not be conceived as a Negro, but a high and chivalrous Moorish chief."<sup>77</sup> Though Othello's skin colour labels him a Moor, Venetians ignore it and view him as an esteemed figure in society. As such, Othello contains all the principal characteristics of the Mediterranean Code of Honour that an honourable man should

have. He has a good reputation in the community; he is a man of integrity whom the society honours and rewards as a result of his exceptional and heroic accomplishments. As Pierre Bourdieu asserts, “it has become a common place to think that men activities determine their social status and that a real man must be honoured, respected and admitted by the community, and should be inside of the circle of real societal approval and reward.”<sup>78</sup> Thus, thanks to his noble deeds and behaviours, Othello succeeds to obtain public esteem and respect.

Iago, Othello’s ancient Lieutenant, is extremely jealous of Othello’s social position and wants to destroy his noble reputation. To achieve his goal, Iago plots to destroy the most important thing in the life of the Moor which is his relationship with Desdemona. “The Moor is of free and open nature”, Iago says. “That thinks men honest that but seem to be so, and will tenderly be led by th’ nose as asses are.”<sup>79</sup> Iago takes advantage of the protagonist’s trusting and honourable nature. In fact, Iago knows he will believe the lies he tells him about Desdemona because he knows that, as a Mediterranean Moor, he is by nature suspicious about women, and that he does not trust them easily. As Ania Loomba claims in her *Shakespeare and cultural difference*, “Iago’s plan is effective because Othello is predisposed to believe his pronouncements about the inherent duplicity of women.”<sup>80</sup> Therefore, in order to destroy him, Iago pretends that Desdemona engages in an affair with Cassio, a newly appointed lieutenant. The protagonist believes Iago’s lies because he holds him in high regard. Othello describes him as “this honest creature doubtless, sees and knows more, much more, than he unfolds.”<sup>81</sup>

As a lover, Othello does not possess the same skill, he has as a warrior. The writer Andre Green suggests that, “Everything shows us that Othello is gifted in the arts of war, that he is successful at it and that he has won glory in its practice; there is nothing to show us that he might have the same talent in love and reap the same success.”<sup>82</sup> Since Othello lacks experience in love and companionship, he easily believes “honest” Iago’s affirmations. Hence, Othello believes he must murder Desdemona and Cassio in order to defend his

honour. As Samuel Coleridge declares, “his honour was concerned, Iago would not have succeeded but by hinting that his honour was compromised.”<sup>83</sup> Iago’s lies about the faithful Desdemona implant murderous ideas in Othello’s head.

After talking with Iago, Othello’s life becomes obsessed with thoughts of murdering Desdemona, and revenge becomes a moral obligation to avenge Cassio and Desdemona. He no longer possesses the virtuous and noble honour he once displayed. Bradley in his *Shakespearean Tragedy* argues that “such a jealousy as that of Othello’s converts human nature into chaos and disorder, and liberates the beast in man.”<sup>84</sup> As a consequence, Iago changes the behaviours of Othello. The proof of this position lies within Scene Four of Act Three, directly after the temptation scene when Iago convinces Othello that Desdemona has had a love affair. Before Cassio arrives, Desdemona boasts about her unwary husband saying, “and but my noble Moor, Is true of mind and made no such baseness, as jealousy creatures are, it were enough, to put him to ill thinking.”<sup>85</sup>

Though Desdemona misplaces her handkerchief, she does not worry that Othello if accuses her of sleeping with another man. When he arrives to see Desdemona in the Scene Four Act Three, however, his nature changes. The protagonist accuses her of having a “liberal hand”<sup>86</sup> and shouts at her for misplacing her handkerchief saying, “Fetch ne the handkerchief my mind misgives.”<sup>87</sup> When Desdemona insists that her husband should show mercy for Cassio, he becomes convinced of her unfaithfulness and feels that she and Cassio pulled him away from his virtue and noble “code of honour”.

More importantly, in his speech to Desdemona in Act Four Scene Two, Othello explains clearly his conception of different kinds of honour.



Had it pleased heaven  
To try me with affliction; had they rain'd  
All kinds of sores and shames on my bare head.  
Steep'd me in poverty to the very lips,  
Given to capacity me and my utmost hopes,  
I should have found in some place of my soul  
A drop of patience; but, alas, to make me  
A fixed figure for the time of scorn  
To point his slow unmoving finger at!  
Yet could I bear that too; well, very well:  
But there, where I have garner'd up my heart,  
Where either I must live or bear no life,  
The fountain from the which my current runs,  
Or else dries up-to be discarded thence!  
Or keep it as a cistern for foul toads  
To knot and gender in.<sup>88</sup>

In the above passage, Othello makes a distinction between his honour as a public man, an officer and gentleman, and as a husband. In the above quotation, Othello claims that he has courage enough to support and bear the loss of the first kind of honour, i.e. his public honour. He has patience to endure all the “scorns” of his fellows, and would have risked himself of being labelled as a weak and incapable man if he had lost his position as an officer and gentleman and becomes prisoner. But, to accept the idea that his wife is unchaste and disloyal is something impossible to tolerate for a man of honour. Though he loves Desdemona and can do everything for her, he has to kill her for the sake of his self-esteem. As Bourdieu claims, “honour is the value that plays the largest role in Mediterranean societies.”<sup>89</sup>

So, as a honourable Mediterranean man, Othello must obey his value of honour because for him the sentiment of honour is more precious than life itself. Bourdieu asserts further that, “manliness and virility, in its ethical aspect, i.e. the point of honour, is very important because it is considered as the principle of the conservation and increase of honour.”<sup>90</sup> For this reason, Othello feels that he loses an important principle that a man of honour needs to maintain his manliness and virility. In addition, in his sociological theory, Bourdieu argues that, “as part of the possession and household of men, women are part of the territory that must be defended to maintain male honour.”<sup>91</sup> Othello sees that the woman he

once considered his own possession and upon whom he relies to maintain his honour betrays him with another man, and she is no longer his possession. As a consequence, Othello thinks that he does not only lose his wife, whom he considers his honour, but also his good name and reputation. The only thing Othello thinks a sacrifice of honour and justice is really murder. Othello justifies his view of justice as follows:

O perjur'd women! Thou dost stone my heart,  
And mak'st me call what I intend to do  
A murder, which I thought a sacrifice,  
I saw the handkerchief.<sup>92</sup>

He sacrifices her for his honour, reputation and good name because he is convinced of her guilt. Bourdieu believes that a real man is someone who feels the need to rise the challenge of opportunities available to him to increase his honour by purchasing glory and distribution in the public sphere.<sup>93</sup> As a man who gives importance to his marital honour, Othello would engage himself in an action rather than words. This is in fact, the threat of a Mediterranean husband who would not hesitate to take revenge on the wife and the involved lover. "Such a Mediterranean scale of revenge could even blind the husband who is searching for his lost honour."<sup>94</sup> So, Othello will try by all means without hesitating to plan the death of his infidel female. Now, that he mistrusts her, Othello hates her as much as he loved her. Before he becomes extremely jealous of Cassio and believes he has been seen as a cuckold saying, "I will chop her into masses! Cuckold me."<sup>95</sup>

For a Mediterranean man, to behave rashly in connection with issues related to honour seems normal and correct. Such issues make a Mediterranean man a distracted person for the rest of his life, "but I do love thee, and when I love thee not chaos is come again",<sup>96</sup> Othello says. Being a Moor, Othello's temper becomes sharp after the rumour about his wife's chastity. All the calm and sweet temper with which Othello behaves with his beloved cannot be restored. He loses the good sense of life and he no longer looks pleased and excited by things around him. One of the characteristics of the Mediterranean husband, a man will not be

at rest until blood is shed for the sake of his lost honour, which is considered as a belief and a primary principle of one's being<sup>97</sup>. As an Arab poet Al- Motanabi said: "never an honour is unhurt unless blood is shed"<sup>98</sup>. Unfortunately, Othello murders his faithful wife because he falsely believes she destroys his honour. He thinks that, "she must die, else she'll betray more men."<sup>99</sup> It is true that the Moor is a noble and successful military man, but when it comes to the question of his wife's chastity, he becomes severely jealous and outraged.

As a Mediterranean man, Othello cannot let his wife live. For him, he must sacrifice her to the cause of honour and chastity. Like other Mediterraneans, Othello is proud of what he has achieved not because he is a military army but because he is a custodian of his family who succeeds to purify his honour and that of his family. As an Arab Moor, Othello is so proud of himself that he would go out among people and pronounce that he killed his wife to restore his honour. Knowing that he kills his wife because of her adultery, Othello stands by her body that lies at peace unaffected by the murder he did. However, when Emilia reveals the truth in a trembling voice, Othello becomes the most miserable of men when he looks at his beloved murdered cold body.

In his final disillusionment, when Iago's villainy has been revealed, he asks himself: "but way should honour outlive honesty?"<sup>100</sup> Iago's honesty, which is now proved to be worthless, equals Othello's honour which led him to commit the crime when he thought he was executing an act of justice. At the end Othello calls himself an "honourable murderer", who did all in honour." However, he was tricked and betrayed by false appearances. In fact, Othello acts as a Mediterranean man must act. As Bourdieu says: "manliness is perceived not only as sexual or social reproduction capacity, but also as the capacity to fight and to exercise violence, especially the act of revenge"<sup>101</sup> and adds that "honour in the Mediterranean countries was the reward for successful power manoeuvres in which a man's relationship to other men is evaluated through women."<sup>102</sup> Therefore, Othello's honour which he considers

consist in Desdemona's virtue no longer exists because he thinks she has destroyed it with her supposed adultery. And for him, the only way to restore the lost honour is killing Desdemona.

In his *Shakespeare and the nature of men*, Spencer remarks that "Othello, when he smothers Desdemona, seems himself 'as the instrument of universal justice, of course he does. Every vengeance of honour so appears to its perpetration."<sup>103</sup> In addition, Menéndez Pidal points out that the Mediterranean avengers, no matter how much they protested, were compelled to murder their wives, because these murderers were a tribute to society as a whole.<sup>104</sup> So, when the truth is gradually revealed, Othello thinks that he should not live longer than his honour. He is driven to take his own life because he has lost not only Desdemona but his good name too. In fact, Othello is a man, who according to his beliefs and traditions, needs that his reputation lives on honourably. Before Othello commits suicide, he asks Lodovico to describe him as a worthy man saying:

Speak of one that loved not wisely, but too well  
Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought,  
Perplexed in the extreme,  
Of one whose hand  
Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away.<sup>105</sup>

Moreover, the Mediterranean "code of honour" seems to underlie not only the vengeance of Othello, but also the rage of Brabantio. When we look at the way Brabantio reacts against the elopement of his daughter Desdemona, it becomes obvious that there is a link between Othello and Brabantio. Even though Othello plays the role of a husband and Brabantio that of a father, the way they perceive the sentiment of honour is the same. At the very beginning of this chapter, I have mentioned that a man's honour depends on the behaviour of his womenfolk and that a man's relationship with other men is evaluated through women. As Meryon Wilson claims, "A daughter or a sister who were publicly suspected of immoral behaviour deprived her father or brother of his honour as well as herself of her own honour."<sup>106</sup> The following quotations demonstrate clearly the link between Othello and

Brabantio. In Act Three Scene Three, Iago reminds Othello: “she did deceive her father marrying you”. This is in fact, the sequel to Brabantio’s verse when he says to Othello: “look to her, Moor, if thou has eyes to see, she has deceiv’d her father, and marry thee.”<sup>107</sup> Brabantio’s case can be explained by the fact that he is deprived of a daughter whom he loved and who loved him well, and who choose to elope with a son in law he does not approve of. In fact, Desdemona not only escapes from her father’s house with a strange man, but also marries a man whom her father does not consider in high regard. In his *the Sentiment of honour* Rubio y. Lluch argues that there is another idea which makes the link between the two men closer. He says that Othello will imagine that his wife’s conduct has prejudiced his marital honour; Brabantio imagines that his daughter has destroyed his honour as a father. Brabantio’s anger at Othello’s secrete marriage with Desdemona is due first to outraged honour and second to outraged fatherly feeling. Hence, Othello’s elopement with Desdemona is a terrible shame and dishonour upon the reputation of Brabantio both as an individual, a man of power, and the head of a great family.

At the beginning of the play we hear the following lines spoken by both Iago and Rodrigo near Brabantio’s house:

Rodrigo: what a full fortune does the thick-lips owe  
 If he can carry’t thus!  
 Iago: call up her father,  
 Rouse him, make after him poison his delight,  
 Proclaim him in the streets; increase her kinsman,  
 And, though he in a fertile climate dwell,  
 Plague him with flies, though that his joy be joy  
 Yet throw such changes of vexation on’t,  
 As it my love some colour.<sup>108</sup>

While analysing the above passage, we deduce that the sayings of Rodrigo and Iago are somehow ambiguous because they can apply both to Othello and Brabantio. For example, in the first line Rodrigo mentions “the thick-lips” which obviously refers to Othello, and Iago mentions “her father” which refers to Brabantio. Meryon Wilson assumes that the pronouns in

the following lines all refer to Othello, but the two malcontents proceed “to rouse” and “to proclaim him in the street” refers to Brabantio. In addition, when Iago says “his delight” we deduce that he may refer to main character’s pleasure in his young bride, as he may refer to Brabantio’s joy in the company of his daughter. But, “dwell in a fertile climate” and “plague with flies” refers to the protagonist. Thus, the first two lines of Iago’s speech can apply both to the father ‘Brabantio’ and to the husband ‘Othello’.

The fact that Iago’s words may refer to both Othello and Brabantio explains that there is a connection between Othello and Brabantio. In fact, Iago shames Brabantio in order to provoke anger against Othello. In other words, Iago’s attack on Othello’s marital honour begins by his attack on Brabantio’s honour as the father of Desdemona. Ewan Fernie in his *Shame in Shakespeare* argues that “Iago employs basically the same technique as he will use later on Othello.”<sup>109</sup> Iago wants to cause shame and humiliation to Brabantio so that to take revenge on Othello. He shouts from the dark street and announces Brabantio with rude and offensive images of his daughter, playing both on sexual and racial fears. Every word pronounced by Iago causes harm and humiliation on Brabantio’s personality both as a Senator, a man of power who is supposed to have a very unique reputation, and a father who is supposed to maintain his daughter’s honour.

A man of honour should possess integrity, nobility of spirit and he must be competent with regard to various problems and dangers, and be able to know how to solve them. He is associated with esteem, refusal to submit to humiliation, dignity and personal virtue. Since the male members stand as collective guards over the honour of their women, “an honourable man should be able to defend the honour of his family's female members, “his wife and daughters should be chaste.”<sup>110</sup> Hence, when Iago tells Brabantio: you have lost half your soul, and then adds: an old black ram is tugging your white ewe, the devil will make a generation of you, and so forth presents Brabantio with a shameful vision on himself as a

dishonoured patriarch, who is supposed to protect his family and look over his female members because male honour as well as family honour depend upon the female behaviour. His first reaction is outraged disbelief of Iago's pronouncements, and then shame and fury mixed with doubtful thoughts that makes him think his daughter has been bewitched or even dragged. He would even prefer that his daughter had married the worthless Rodrigo. Iago's lines seem harmful because Iago's intention is to proclaim Brabantio's dishonour as loudly as he could so that all people from the street could listen. Honour is reputation, so what Brabantio's reputation will become when words like these are shouted in the street. As Bourdieu asserts, "honour is related to reputation and to the upholding of male power."<sup>111</sup> Thus, what would people think of the Senator Brabantio after hearing all these insults about his daughter?

Living in a patriarchal society, where honour and reputation play a crucial role, Brabantio loses his status and reputation because he fails in some of the factors on which his honour depends; that of protecting and guarding the honour of his daughter. Ewan Fernie claims, "Shame brought home to him by Iago of Desdemona's marriage to the Moor, and the prospect which represents him of the miscegenation of his race, that has been specified by the play and which we, therefore, assume is the cause of his death. Consequently, Desdemona's "honourless actions" result in destroying Brabantio's public honour as well as his family honour. Unlike Othello, Brabantio does not exercise any act of revenge to avenge his honour so that he would restore his lost honour and becomes honourable again in the eyes of fellows and his community as a whole. At first, Brabantio gathers his relatives and armed retainers to seek out Othello, and holes him as a 'thief' before the council for abusing his daughter. However, when Othello and Desdemona returns as a husband and a wife, the Duke and the council can do anything for Brabantio. Even though she is his daughter, she is no longer his possession but, her husband's. The only man who is now supposed to look after Desdemona's

honour and defend her reputation is Othello because, after marriage, she becomes his own possession and householder.

We see then, that Othello's dishonour is the sequel to the dishonour of Brabantio by Iago and Rodrigo. Rodrigo has no honour. Iago pretends to have honour and esteem but as it best suits his plans. Meryon Wilson says that "when Iago talks about how Emilia may have slept with Othello or will sleep with Cassio, he is merely hunting for a motive for his malignity".<sup>112</sup> He argues that Iago suspects his wife with Othello when he says: "it is thought abroad that Othello slept with Emilia,"<sup>113</sup> and adds that, "for that I do suspect the lusty Moor."<sup>114</sup> Here we deduce that Iago expresses fear only of what Cassio may do in the future, not of what Othello has done. Such rumours and fears of a supposed adultery were the reasons for murder by some Mediterranean men. Iago says only that he has heard that some people say that he was cuckolded by Othello, and later he says that he suspects him and fears Cassio. Even if these are only rumours and that Othello never seduced Emilia, Iago has reasons enough to suppose that his marital honour is stained by an untrue rumour and would react differently. However, Iago's honour does not resemble a Mediterranean's honour because if he is a man who gives importance to the sentiment of honour, he will at least investigate about the revolt whether it is true or not or kill Emilia if he is sure of her unfaithfulness. Because, a man who does not care about his honour particularly his marital one, is considered as a man of shame. Iago treats honour as he treats something absurd, he plays with it and never applies its principle to his own case. Thus, from here we can deduce that Iago's reaction does not fit the Mediterranean code of honour.



## Endnotes:

- <sup>56</sup> F. Markham, *the Booke of Honour* (London: Augufline Mattbewes and John Norton, 1625), p. 1.
- <sup>57</sup> Peristiany, *Honour and Shame*, 16.
- <sup>58</sup> Watson, *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honour*, 12.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.
- <sup>60</sup> Sandra Busatta, 'Honour and Shame in the Mediterranean' *Antrocom* Vol 2 – n. 2 (2006): 75-78.
- <sup>61</sup> Watson, *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honour*, 12.
- <sup>62</sup> Dov Coher and Joseph A. Vandella, *Male Honor and Female Fidelity: Implicit Cultural Scripts that Perpetuate Domestic Violence* (*Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2003), 998.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 998.
- <sup>64</sup> Wilson, *a Hispanist Looks at Othello*, 201.
- <sup>65</sup> Maria Luisa Donobeitia, *Shakespeare and the Mediterranean Tradition* (Granada: University of Granada Press, 1992), 90.
- <sup>66</sup> Pitt-Rivers, *Honour and Social Status*, 46.
- <sup>67</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, 'the Sentiment of Honour in Kabyle Society': *Honour and shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (London, 1965), 191-241.
- <sup>68</sup> Wilson, *a Hispanist Looks at Othello*, 202.
- <sup>69</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 50.
- <sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.
- <sup>71</sup> Loomba, *Shakespeare and Cultural Difference*, 169.
- <sup>72</sup> Pitt-Rivers, *Honour and Social Status*, 5.
- <sup>73</sup> Wilson, *a Hispanist looks at Othello*, 204.
- <sup>74</sup> Skiba, *Othello the Moor of Venice*, 16.
- <sup>75</sup> William Shakespeare, *Othello: the Moor of Venice* (London: Penguin Popular Classics, 2006), II, i, 275-278.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, I, iii, 287-288.
- <sup>77</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Othello", *Coleridge's Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. R.A. Foakes (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1989), 115.
- <sup>78</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 34.
- <sup>79</sup> Shakespeare, *Othello*, I, iii, 381-383.

- <sup>80</sup> Loomba, *Shakespeare and Cultural Difference*, 93.
- <sup>81</sup> Shakespeare, *Othello*, III, iii, 247-48.
- <sup>82</sup> Andre Green, "Othello: a Tragedy of Conversion, Black Magic and White Magic", in *Shakespearean Tragedy*, ed. John Drakakis (New York: Longman, 1992), 339.
- <sup>83</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Othello", 116.
- <sup>84</sup> Arthur Kirsch, *the Passions of Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 75.
- <sup>85</sup> Shakespeare, *Othello*, III, iv, 16-19.
- <sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, III, iv, 39.
- <sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, III, iv, 8.
- <sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, ii, 48-63.
- <sup>89</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 49.
- <sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.
- <sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.
- <sup>92</sup> Shakespeare, *Othello*, V, ii, 66-68.
- <sup>93</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 54.
- <sup>94</sup> Jamil Y. Al-Asmar, *Othello and the Discourse of Orientalism* (PhD diss, Al-Azhar University of Gaza, 2003), 6.
- <sup>95</sup> *Othello*, VI, i, 196.
- <sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, III, ii, 91-92.
- <sup>97</sup> Jamil, *Othello and Orientalism*, 7.
- <sup>98</sup> Albarkooky A, *Sharh Diwan Al-Motanabi* (Dar Al-Kitabi, 1986), 252.
- <sup>99</sup> *Othello*, V, ii, 5-6.
- <sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, V, ii, 248.
- <sup>101</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 47.
- <sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.
- <sup>103</sup> Theodore Spencer, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Men* (Macmillan, 1966), 135.
- <sup>104</sup> Wilson, *a Hispanist looks at Othello*, 205.
- <sup>105</sup> Shakespeare, *Othello*, I, ii, 381-384.
- <sup>106</sup> Meryon Wilson, *a Hispanist Looks at Othello*, 201.
- <sup>107</sup> Shakespeare, *Othello*, III, iii, 208.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., I, i, 67-74.

<sup>109</sup> Fernie, *Shame in Shakespeare*, 147.

<sup>110</sup> Davis J, *People of the Mediterranean on Essay in Comparative Social Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 1977), 1977.

<sup>111</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 39.

<sup>112</sup> Meryon, *a Hispanist Looks at Othello*, 213.

<sup>113</sup> Shakespeare, *Othello*, I, ii, 88.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., I, i, 90.

## Chapter III

### Female honour

Females, ideals of feminine sacrifice and family loyalty should be strongest in cultures of honour. The importance of family cohesion, coupled with traditional gender roles, should create strong pressures for women to stay in relationships despite danger or harm. A woman thus bears the responsibility to sacrifice herself for the good of the family or relationship regardless of personal cost.<sup>115</sup>

To begin this chapter, it is important to note that the sentiment of honour in cultures of honour applies not only to males but to females as well. As I have already mentioned in the previous chapter, honour in the Mediterranean societies is perceived as the way a person sees himself/herself and the way a society regards him/her. Du Bouley states that honour is a sense which “has reality if the rest of the community grants it that reality.”<sup>116</sup> Hence, to honour a person is to acknowledge publicly that his or her actions conform with the social norms.

In addition, while certain virtues such as honesty, integrity, loyalty are common to both male and female, the concepts of honour and shame have to do with a person’s gender and consequently his or her position in a society and the household. As Pitt-Rivers asserts, “The honour of a man and that of a woman... imply quite different modes of conduct.”<sup>117</sup> As I have already explained in the previous chapter, male honour is usually defined as more complex, involving matters of defence, physical prowess, and economic as well as professional competence. In contrast, female honour is more related to modesty, shame and the avoidance of behaviours that might threaten the good name of the family such as adultery or sexual immodesty. Therefore, these gender roles imply a more active role for men and a passive one for women. Unlike male honour, female honour is centred on the avoidance of shame. As Pierre Bourdieu declares: “it is men and men only that can have or obtain honour; women are inherently shameful and outside of the real societal approval and award.”<sup>118</sup> Indeed, women have a great responsibility in determining the reputation of their families as

well as their husbands. In *her of Vigilance and Virgins*, Schneider said that in the Mediterranean cultures, honour of the family goes through the female.<sup>119</sup> Women can stain the family honour through their honourless behaviours, as they can increase the reputation of the family through their sexual purity and chastity. More importantly, a woman's honour is judged by her sense of sexual shame. Though this is not applicable to the case of men, the term 'shame' has two distinct meanings when applied to women. First, shame can refer to a woman's sensibility about what others think of her i.e. her reputation. Second, it can refer to her dishonour in the sense that she is considered as shameless because of her honourless actions and behaviours.<sup>120</sup> So, while for men shame refers only to the loss of honour, for women it can be both positive and negative at the same time.

Moreover, since a woman's honour is related to sexual purity and viewed as the key principle that can preserve the whole family's honour and reputation, "restrictions are placed on the freedom of movement of women."<sup>121</sup> If unmarried, her honour and that of her family depends on her virginity. Thus, the virginity of a family's unmarried woman is a highly valued attribute. According to Campbell, when a woman reaches a marriageable age, her honour depends primarily on her being married, particularly at a young age.<sup>122</sup> Therefore, early marriage is seen as a better solution because it will protect her sexual temptations which would destroy her honour and reputation. This is why in early modern societies; unmarried women were regarded as a threat to men. Their reputation may be doubtful if they did not have a male protector who would keep them within honourable bounds. As Bourdieu says, "As part of the possessions and household of men, women are part of the territory that must be defended in order to maintain male honour."<sup>123</sup> It is obvious here that unmarried women have more chances to lose their honour when they are still unmarried, but it does not mean that once married, they are allowed to behave as they will. Once married, women should possess other attributes to be regarded as women of honour. First they should not show

themselves frequently in public or attract attention because it is assumed that women, who make themselves far too conspicuous, are suspected of having something amiss with their feeling of shame and their sexual behaviour.<sup>124</sup> Second, a woman's honour depends on her obedience and respect towards her husband.

In his *Masculine Domination*, Bourdieu argues that: "in the Mediterranean societies women are regarded as extremely 'weak'. They are physically and morally weak, because alone they are fundamentally incapable of successfully resisting either the hostile world outside the family or the nether world's forces of demonic temptation."<sup>125</sup> Therefore, according to Bourdieu's ideas, female honour must be constantly guarded and surveyed by their male counterparts to prevent any sexual temptation which will destroy not only their own honour and reputation but their male partner's as well.

Furthermore, one important distinction between male and female honour is that if it is lost, there is the possibility for men to restore their honour, but there is no possibility for women to restore their honour and reputation. Hence, a woman's sexual reputation is the key component of her honour, as Rush Kelso has reorganized in her study of Renaissance texts for women, "let a woman has chastity, she has all. Let lack chastity and she has nothing."<sup>126</sup> From Kalso's quotation we understand that a woman's honour and reputation depends on her chastity because if she loses her sexual purity men would consider mistrust her. It is for this reason, in early Mediterranean cultures, the ideal of feminine virtue is static and consisted of the preservation of her chastity while masculine virtue is dynamic and active. Men may add honour to their names by noble deeds and accomplishments while women may only defend the small piece of honour they have.

The patriarchal Venetian society, presented in *Othello* represents the role and position of women in the early modern times. Men consider women to be possessions, who ought to

remain submissive, obedient and chaste all the time. Shakespeare's male characters often reveal a predisposition to distrust their women because they tend to consider them naturally inconsistent and fickle. All along the play, men seem free to refer to women as 'whores'. The language that Shakespeare provides to his female characters suggests that they have internalized the society's expectations, and since they are familiar with the male domination and by the fact that they are considered as being inferior and unchaste, it becomes something natural. This is, in fact, what Bourdieu calls "habitus". He argues that "women's participation in their own domination is founded on the concept of habitus."<sup>127</sup> Habitus for Bourdieu is related to all the manners with which we behave, think and feel that are the product of our socialization i.e. all what we have acquired from our families and education. Habitus, in fact, is considered as the second nature of human beings. Therefore, women from androcentric societies are grown up with the idea that men are the dominant figures and by the time these thoughts become something natural and normal.

The three female characters of the play namely, Desdemona, Emilia and Bianca, are all affected and oppressed by the patriarchal society in different ways. Desdemona, the faithful wife and her servant Emilia are suppressed by the society's male domination and its views that women should be owned by men as if they are properties. Bianca, on the other hand, has more freedom than of the other women due to her role as a courtesan. However, the fact that she works in this domain, she is also suppressed because she is considered as a woman of shame who has no honour and reputation. Thus, her lower status in society is paid for by her freedom. We deduce then, that none of the three female characters presented by Shakespeare are considered as individual persons. They are all three 'owned' by men. They are viewed by their male counterparts as subhumans and properties.

They are, in fact, properties to be used dominated and, at the same time, abused or even humiliated and killed if they are disobedient or unfaithful. Hence, it is clear that the men

of the play see Desdemona as a piece of property to be owned. Her father, Brabantio, is outraged after finding that Desdemona has eloped with Othello. He calls Othello a thief. In fact, Brabantio treats Othello as a thief because he believes that he has stolen his daughter's virginity upon which he relies to maintain his personal as well as his public honour and reputation because, I have mentioned in the previous chapter, men's honour depends on the sexual behaviour and their female partners. Also, Brabantio considers Desdemona as a property and an object which he believes as the key principle of the conservation and increase of honour. He sees her as a precious property that is now stolen. Thus, Brabantio sees Othello as a thief of his property. Iago says, "Awake! What, ho Brabantio! Thieves! Thieves! Thieves. Look to your house, your daughter and your bags! Thieves! Thieves."<sup>128</sup> It is clear from this quotation that men view women as properties. Iago awakes Brabantio to declare that his daughter has been stolen and he enunciates the name of Desdemona with 'the house' and 'the bags'. In this context, Pierre Bourdieu argues in his *Masculine Domination* that: "Women belong to men, whether they are relatives or husbands", and adds that: "As part of the possessions and households of men, women are part of the territory that must be defended."<sup>129</sup> In this quotation, Bourdieu observes that women are viewed as possessions of men just like a territory that should be guarded.

In addition, the relationship between Iago and Emilia, we deduce that there is no love but only possession and domination by the male and submission by the female. Iago ends up murdering his wife to try to get rid of her to save his own life. Besides, throughout Shakespeare's *Othello*, we notice that men distrust their women, and do not hesitate to label them whores and prostitutes because they consider them naturally inconstant, temptresses and easy to cheat on their husbands because of their sexual power. They are considered as being shameful and without honour because with a simple honourless action and behaviour they can



risk not only themselves but their male counterparts as well to lose their honour and reputation. As Bourdieu observes, “women are inherently shameful.”<sup>130</sup>

Such views of women are apparent in the play. Desdemona for instance, is praised for her devotion and censured for her sexuality. She is described as deceptive, proud and mainly putative. Diane Elizabeth Dreher observes that Desdemona’s strong sexuality is disturbing, “of all Shakespeare’s female character she is the most sensuous...Desdemona is faithful but must have something of a slut in her.”<sup>131</sup> In fact, Desdemona’s elopement stands as proof of her deceptive nature, “a measure of her determination to have a life that seems to offer the promise of excitement denied her as a sheltered Venetian senator’s daughter.”<sup>132</sup> Hence, Desdemona’s deceptive behaviour towards her father makes an unpleasant impression among the men. This elopement will implant doubtful impressions on her actions and behaviour. The fact that she has enough courage to betray her father makes other men think she is a mistrustful woman. After Desdemona’s elopement with Othello, Brabantio immediately disowns his daughter and declares that he has lost his jewel. The fact that Desdemona fails to obey her father who is the symbol of authority and force, means that she has lost her good name and reputation because as Bourdieu claims, “the women’s honour depends on her obedience and respect towards both her father and her husband.”<sup>133</sup>

It is true that Desdemona’s love liberates her long enough to marry Othello, but in her conception of marriage she again succumbs herself in a traditional role inherited from her mother by adopting a relationship in which the wife becomes her husband’s submissive and obedient subject. By marrying Othello, Desdemona conforms to the traditional norms for feminine behaviour. These norms involve first, “the acknowledgement of a husband’s superiority, and second a due esteemed of her own husband to be the best for her, and worthy of honour on her part.”<sup>134</sup>

Therefore, Desdemona announces that her “heart’s subdu’d, even to the very quality of my lord.”<sup>135</sup> In Act Three Scene Three, Desdemona says: “whate’er you be I am obedient”<sup>136</sup>, preferring to follow Othello’s command rather than think for herself. Even in his jealous rages, she addresses him with love and respect. She behaves as a woman of honour should behave; she is obedient, submissive, passive and chaste.

However, the fact that Othello believes that women are inherently shameful and distrustful, he is immediately imported by Iago’s false accusations of Desdemona’s adultery. Being a Moor, Othello has the Mediterranean capacity to imagine the unimaginable. After Iago’s false accusatory claims on Desdemona’s unfaithfulness, doubtful thoughts are implanted in his mind. In fact, one of the reasons Othello is so susceptible to Iago’s machinations is the belief that “these delicate creatures”, i.e. women, have sexual appetites that cannot be controlled. Iago informs Othello that Venetian women know well how to deceive a man. Othello then, believes that being a cuckold is a fate that great men, as well as ordinary men, must inevitably suffer. Therefore, as C.B. Watson observes, if women are held suspect because of a natural tendency to fickleness, it is no wonder that their husbands were apt to spend sleepless nights.<sup>137</sup>

Indeed, Othello is a kind of man who would believe a man more than a woman. Since the time Iago informs him about his wife’s supposed revolt, he becomes extremely suspicious that he believes he must kill Desdemona. Having a cheating wife, no matter how common, is still a blow to one’s manhood. As Bourdieu claims, “manliness is considered as the principle of the conservation and increase of honour.”<sup>138</sup> Hence, it is Othello’s pride that is most hurt when he believes that Desdemona is cheating on him saying, “But, alas, to make me a fixed figure for the time of scorn, to point his slow unmoving finger at!”<sup>139</sup> C.B. Watson pointed out in regard of Othello’s jealousy, that Othello kills Desdemona “in a conviction as any man would and must have entertained who had believed Iago’s honesty as Othello did.”<sup>140</sup>

Othello wishes to kill Desdemona's sexuality and potential for infidelity. His decision to kill Desdemona, he claims, is to prevent her from a further transgression saying: "Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men."<sup>141</sup> As Iago's insinuations construct, the gulf between perceptions of Desdemona as an angel and the fear of her as a whore grows, leaving Othello in a void of confusion and doubt that he voices as follows:

By the world!  
I think my wife be honest,  
And think she is not!  
I think thou art just,  
And then think thou art not.<sup>142</sup>

The fact that Othello refuses to hear Desdemona's own protestations of innocence, enables us to deduce that the feminist characters in the play are subordinated to the male. In this regard Bourdieu states: "masculine domination represents the forms and ways to maintain and consolidate the social order in which subjugation and subordination of women coexist simultaneously."<sup>143</sup>

Although the role of Emilia may seem to be a minor one, she also, like Desdemona, is oppressed by her husband. The objectification of women also occurs with Iago. He names women, even the best of women, no better than nursemaids or households. In fact, Iago has no respect for his wife Emilia and believes that she is sleeping with both Othello and Cassio. Even Cassio shows some of these same views of women. For him, women are either put on pedestals to be worshiped as he does towards Desdemona, or they are prostitutes just like Bianca. The three women in the play are regarded as the destroyers of men's honour and esteem. As I have mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Shakespeare's male characters do not hesitate to label their female partners as 'whores'. For instance, Othello's fear of Desdemona's sexuality erupts into slanderous abuse on a number of occasions. He refers to her as "whore"<sup>144</sup> and a "cunning whore."<sup>145</sup> Bianca too is described by Iago as a "housewife"<sup>146</sup> and "stumpet" though there is no evidence to suggest that she is actually a

prostitute. Similarly, when Emilia reveals Iago's horrific events of the Act five, he vents his rage and fury upon Emilia labelling her a "villainous whore."<sup>147</sup> Hence, all the three women of the play are accused of prostitution and inappropriate sexual conduct, yet it appears that none of them is guilty.

As a consequence, a woman's honour is a serious issue because it is not a fault of the behaviour of a man, but always that of a woman. Never a woman feels dishonoured because her husband has a lover but the opposite is true. A man always feels dishonoured and humiliated when his woman's partner commits adultery. Meryon James observes that, "men of honour could (and did) lie, cheat, deceive, plot, treason, seduce and commit adultery without incurring dishonour."<sup>148</sup> In his *Masculine Domination*, Bourdieu argues, "to be 'dominant' is to be the honourable man and to be subordinate is to be a woman."<sup>149</sup> Therefore, since the definitions of female honour are derived from the requirements of male honour, so "male codes of honour" require them to be dominant figures, and "female codes of honour" insisted on obedience and loyalty at every level of society.

## Endnotes

- <sup>115</sup> Coher and Vandella, *Male Honor and Female Fidelity*, 998.
- <sup>116</sup> J Du Boulay, *Portrait of a Greek Mountain village* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 405.
- <sup>117</sup> Pitt-Rivers, *Honour and Social Status*, 20.
- <sup>118</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 37-41.
- <sup>119</sup> Schneider J, *Of Vigilance and Virgins: Honour, Shame and Access to Resources in Mediterranean Societies* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 1-24.
- <sup>120</sup> Neyrey J H and Malina B J, *Honour and Shame in the Luke Acts: Pivotal Values of Mediterranean World* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1991), 41.
- <sup>121</sup> Rosenfeld H, "Social and Economic Factors in Explanation of the Increase of Patrilineal Endogamy in the Arab Village in Israel", in *Mediterranean Family Strictness*, ed. Peristiany J G (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 122.
- <sup>122</sup> Campbell J K, *Honour, Family and Patronage* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), 150.
- <sup>123</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 39-41.
- <sup>124</sup> Ina-Maria Greverus, *Anthropological Journal on European Cultures : the Mediterranean Reworking the Past, Shaping the Present, Considering the Future* (London : Lit, 2001), 39-42.
- <sup>125</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 58.
- <sup>126</sup> Kelso R, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (New York :University of Illinois Press, 1956), 24.
- <sup>127</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 52-55.
- <sup>128</sup> Shakespeare, *Othello*, I, i, 45-48.
- <sup>129</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 57.
- <sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.
- <sup>131</sup> Dreher, *Domination and Defiance*, 92.
- <sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.
- <sup>133</sup> Bourdieu, *Domination Masculine*, 19.
- <sup>134</sup> Dreher, *Domination and Defiance*, 100-102.
- <sup>135</sup> Shakespeare, *Othello*, IV, ii, 55-57.
- <sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, V, iii, 6.
- <sup>137</sup> Watson, *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honour*, 445.

<sup>138</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 34-41.

<sup>139</sup> Shakespeare, *Othello*, V, iii, 6.

<sup>140</sup> Watson, *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of honour*, 445-447.

<sup>141</sup> Shakespeare, *Othello*, III, iii, 356.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, ii, 20.

<sup>143</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 34-41.

<sup>144</sup> Shakespeare, *Othello*, III, iii, 356.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, ii, 220.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, ii, 88.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, V, ii, 227.

<sup>148</sup> James M, *English Politics and the Concept of Honour* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 28.

<sup>149</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 38-45.

## Conclusion

The dissertation examined the sentiment of honour in William Shakespeare's *Othello: the Moor of Venice (1602)* as it is developed in Pierre Bourdieu's Sociological Theory. Through analysing the sentiment of honour, I come to the conclusion that though the play was written by an Englishman, the way Shakespeare manoeuvres the concept of honour shows that it fits the characteristics of the Mediterranean "code of honour".

Besides, relying on Bourdieu's sociological approach, I have based my analysis on the idea that in order to gain honour, men and women have to adopt and display behaviours and roles which are imposed of their gender. Female honour is based on sexual honesty or chastity whereas male honour is based on non sexual behaviour. In terms of male honour, the first chapter revealed that the honour and reputation of a man depend on a woman's sexual purity. In the case of Othello, the death of Desdemona is inevitable because as his wife, she destroyed his good name and reputation by her supposed adultery.

In this respect, Desdemona's sexual behaviour drove Othello to kill her because according to the Mediterranean code of honour, a man is obliged to kill a human being he loves to defend his honour and reputation. As Bourdieu asserts, male honour is precariously balanced upon the actions of honourless women. Hence, Othello's reaction does not reflect an Anglo-Saxon attitude towards chastity, but a purely Mediterranean one.

If Desdemona really destroyed Othello's honour, which depends upon her demeanour, and then as honour is considered so precious, his honour would be restored only by killing her. In this way, I come to the conclusion that Othello's attitude fits the Mediterranean tradition about the lost honour.

As for female honour, the second chapter presented the way a woman should behave to maintain her honour and reputation. In fact, a woman's honour is a serious issue because it is not a question of the behaviour of a man, but always that of a woman. In the case of Desdemona, I have concluded that despite she is obedient and chaste, she is always considered as having something slut in her because as Bourdieu argues, women are inherently shameful.

What should be kept in mind in the light of what has been said so far is that the most important thing in preserving the honour and the reputation of an individual or that of a family in the Mediterranean societies is the behaviour of a woman. Women, in fact, play a vital and significant role in honour cultures because they are the only ones who can not only increase and conserve the major values that structure everyday attitudes and behaviours, but they can also destroy them. Hence, the kind of honour which is considered as the most precious and at the same time the most dangerous is the one which embraces the behaviour of a woman. Of course, this type of honour involves both men and women because the sentiment of honour in this respect cannot stand for one single sex. On the one hand, a man's honour depends on the demeanour of his wife, or his mother, or even his sister. On the other hand, a woman's honour depends on her obedience, loyalty and chastity towards her husband, father, or even her brother.



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