

Adapting Shakespeare Around the Globe

The Construction of Otherness and its Ideological Stakes in the Films *O* and *Omkara*

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Abstract In the past two decades, the rejection of the fidelity criterion has led to the release of a multitude of films that rework and appropriate canonical literary works to suit local political goals. The works of William Shakespeare have been some of the main beneficiaries of this new direction, as indicated by the significant number of appropriations, remediations, and ‘tradaptations’ (translations-adaptations) that have turned Shakespeare into a global figure. In this article I focus on two film adaptations of *Othello*, *O* (Nelson, 2001) and *Omkara* (Bhardwaj, 2006), that recontextualize the play’s narrative content into two different settings at the turn of the millennia: the American South and India. My aim is to highlight the manner in which the two films repurpose the content of the play in order to reveal the tensions that mark the two local cultures. Early modern concerns such as miscegenation, female sexuality, and religious and racial otherness are appropriated and represented along new cultural coordinates that reflect the anxieties of the two new local cultures. For example, in *O*, the issue of miscegenation is translated in accordance with the racism that marks the conservative American South, while in *Omkara* miscegenation is translated as the conflict between two Indian views on marriage: the traditional one that advocates arranged marriages, and the modern one that supports love marriages.

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1 Introduction¹

Shakespeare’s *Othello* is a domestic tragedy that brings into focus transcultural themes, such as those of accommodating otherness, the projection of dominant anxieties on race and gender, and miscegenation. In recent film ‘tradaptations’ (Hodgdon 2003, 99; Nicolaescu 2010, 101-2) or appropriations (Sanders 2006, 26) of *Othello*, these issues are tackled relative to the

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new cultural contexts in which the narrative content is transposed. The aim of this paper is to analyse the cultural translation of these themes in Tim Blake Nelson's *O* (2001) and Vishal Bhardwaj *Omkara* (2006). Both films rework and repurpose Shakespeare so as to fit their respective local cultural tensions, namely the inclusion of African-Americans in South American society, and the tension between conservative and liberal/progressive views on marriage in contemporary India. The two films are indicative of a deterritorialized condition of Shakespeare's works that, in the age of globalisation, have travelled beyond national English border and have been adapted to new cultural environments.

2 Otherness in the Play

The in-betweenness of *Othello* is announced as the play's main theme from its very beginning by its subtitle, *The Moor of Venice*, which features the juxtaposition of two nouns representing two irreconcilable cultures. Venice is the name of a Christian, almost modern state, while 'moor' is a word that in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries designated inhabitants of Northern Africa, who could be non-black Muslims, black Christians or black Muslims (Hall 2007, 359). The type of otherness predicated by the historical meaning of 'moor' is a broad one which may include religious, ethnic, racial alterity, or any intersection of the three. In the case of Shakespeare's *Othello*, the kind of otherness to which the play refers seems primarily to be a racial one. The text of the play undeniably remarks Othello's black complexion, yet it is not clear to what extent the phrases used are to be treated as an objective representation of the character, as exaggerations of Iago, or as embellishments of the author. If Iago's descriptions are accurate, "black ram" (*Othello*, I, 1, 26), then Othello is to be considered as having a very dark skin colour, thus signifying radical otherness. If, on the other hand, Iago is merely exaggerating out of hate, or Shakespeare was only embellishing his character's speech with hyperboles, then Othello is a moor with a lighter black skin colour. In this case, the character is more familiar and what is stressed is his hybridity.

Othello's hybridity is reflected throughout the entire play and marks the character's evolution from a valiant soldier in the service of the Venetian state to a murderer. He is a case of mimicry, "almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 1994, 86) and it is up to the other characters, depending on their goals and interests, to recognise Othello's sameness and discard his otherness, or, conversely, to acknowledge his otherness and ignore his sameness. As far as the former case is concerned, characters such as the senators will describe him as a "valiant Moor" (*Othello*, III, 1, 35) and Cassio will claim "For I have serv'd him, and the man com-

mands | Like a full soldier" (*Othello*, II, 1, 47-8). As far as the latter case is concerned, Roderigo and especially Iago are very keen on stressing his otherness.

Their prejudice against Othello relies on early modern conceptualizations of the soul, which pay tribute to Ancient Greek accounts by Plato and Aristotle. As Peter Harrison argues, one fundamental preoccupation of early modern philosophy was the condition of man after the Fall. A salient trait of post-lapsarian man that early modern philosophers sought to mend was man's (or, to be more precise, reason's) incapacity to govern the passions (Harrison 2007, 6). While reason was regarded as a higher nobler part of the soul, the divine part of man even, the passions were seen as unruly motions of the sensitive, animal, natural part of man, which were intimately connected to the body and the senses (Dixon 2003, 18-21). While western culture had a long tradition of cultivating and inventing therapies to tame the passions,² non-western cultures had no such preoccupation, which meant that their subjects, sharing the same decayed post-lapsarian condition, were likely to let themselves be governed by the passions, i.e. by their animal parts.

Reading *Othello* from this perspective, we can claim that Iago's slanderous insults are also informed by early modern pre-psychology. In fact, Iago's overtly expressed view on the soul tunes in very well with the debates unfolding and the ideas that circulated in Shakespeare's time:

Our bodies are gardens, to the which our | wills are gardeners; [...] But we have | reason to cool our raging motions, our carnal | stings, our unbitted lusts; whereof I take this that | you call love, to be a sect or scion. (*Othello*, I, 3, 44; italics added)

Iago endorses the idea of a conflicting nature of man, with his body and its 'motions' struggling against a reason which seeks to 'cool' them. The garden metaphor sheds light upon the privileged position occupied by reason in relation to the sensitive part of the soul (Dixon 2003, 31). Consequently, when Iago calls Othello "an old black ram" (*Othello*, I, 1, 26) or "barbary horse" (*Othello*, I, 1, 26), he hints at the presupposed dominance of his lower sensitive part of his soul over reason. Even those descriptions that do not allude to the animal world still refer to his body, "thick lips" (*Othello*, I, 1, 26) or "his Moorship" (*Othello*, I, 1, 24) and, therefore, stresses the same anxiety of the unnatural government of the sensitive over the rational soul. Given the overemphasis laid by Iago on Othello's difference and the rapaciousness with which he projects what we today might call negative stereotypes on his black skin, it is safe to say that, for

² Richard Sorabji (2000) in his book *Emotion and Peace of Mind* argues that developing therapies for taming the passions are as early as Stoic philosophy.

Iago, Othello's turns into "*menace* – a difference that is almost total but not quite" (Bhabha 1994, 91; italics in the original).

Intimately related to Othello's otherness and his hybridity is the issue of miscegenation. While Brabatio's "treason of the blood" (*Othello*, I, 1, 28) may mislead us into reading Othello's and Desdemona's marriage in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century racist terms, I propose that we approach their marriage by referring to the same early modern philosophical context. In early modernity, man's soul was viewed as a microcosmos. The conflict between reason and the passions was reflected in the world outside man as well, both in politics and in the family. From a political point of view, the king represented reason while the masses represented the passions; in the domestic sphere of the family the parallel was just as valid. Because women were deemed incapable of properly governing their passions, they had to submit themselves to their husband's reason (Harrison 1998, 51). However, if the husband himself was a person incapable of managing his own sensitive part, then how could he be able to successfully keep his wife in check? The bond between Desdemona and Othello is seen as unnatural first and foremost because, according to early modern conceptions, the foundation of masculine supremacy is undermined by Othello's being subdued by the sensitive part of his soul. Married to Othello, Desdemona would become an unruly wife under a husband incapable of governing her.

The play further reflects early modern anxieties with respect to women's fickleness, inconstancy, and tendency to yield to the passions. When discussing Desdemona's love for Othello, Iago claims that

Her eye must be *fed*; | and what delight shall she have to look on the | devil? When the blood is made dull with the act of | sport, there should be,— again to inflame it and to | give satiety a fresh appetite,—loveliness in favour; | sympathy in years, manners, and beauties; all which | the Moor is defective in: now, for want of these | required conveniences, her delicate tenderness will | find itself abused, begin to heave the gorge, | disrelish and abhor the Moor; very *nature* will | instruct her in it, and compel her to some second | choice [...]. (*Othello*, II, 1; italics added)

According to Iago, Desdemona's attraction to Othello is driven by her desire to please her senses. Such a carnal love cannot last, hence she will move on to the next lover, once her appetite is satiated. The use of the word "nature" in "very nature will instruct her" suggests that she has no control over her bodily appetitive side, that she is a slave to her passions. This description of Desdemona is in keeping with the early modern prejudice against women as sensuous, fickle and inconstant beings.

Besides the fear of untamed passions, Othello's otherness is additionally buttressed by his association with pre-modern practices. The only reason-

able explanation for Desdemona elopement that Brabantio can come up with is the use of magic.

O thou foul thief, where hast thou stow'd my daughter? | Damn'd as thou art, thou hast enchanted her; | [...] That thou hast practis'd on her with foul charms; | Abus'd her delicate youth with drugs or minerals | That weaken motion:—I'll have't disputed on. (*Othello*, II, 1, 32)

Magic and sorcery are chiefly pre-modern practices, against which Christianity warns. In the eyes of Brabantio, who voices a widely shared cultural anxiety, Othello is not only of a different race, but also a pagan. Brabantio's accusation completes the spectrum of anxieties carried by Moorish identity in the sense that now Othello's racial otherness intersects that of religious otherness.

In the context of the characters' radical positions towards Othello, it is interesting to see how Othello regards himself. Not surprisingly, his opinion of himself is ambivalent, partly confirming the views of both sides. On the one hand, Othello regards himself as being capable of governing his passions: "My parts, my title, and *my perfect soul* | Shall manifest me rightly" (*Othello*, II, 1, 30; italics added) and tells Iago that he wants to know the truth about Desdemona: "not To please the palate of my appetite; | Nor to comply with heat,—the young affects" (*Othello*, III, 1, 42). On the other hand, when he is faced with the brawl roused by Cassio he admits: "Now, by heaven, My blood begins *my safer guides to rule*; | *And passion, having my best judgement collid*, | Assays to lead the way (*Othello*, II, 2, 64; italics added). Othello adopts the dominant discourse on otherness by sharing the general idea that women easily give sway to their appetites: "Oh, curse of marriage. | That we can call these delicate creatures ours. | And not their appetites!" (*Othello*, III, 3, 83). He regards the Turks as the radical others against whom the Venetian community and he define themselves: "Are we turn'd Turks, and to ourselves do that | Which Heaven hath forbid the Ottomites?" (*Othello*, II, 3, 62). Yet he does not refrain from committing murder, an act that defies his alleged allegiance to the laws of the Venetian state. He denies having used magic in wooing Desdemona, but tells her that the handkerchief that his mother gave him has "magic in the web of it" (*Othello* IV, 3, 92).

Othello is incapable of creating a coherent narrative about himself that can accommodate both facets of his identity. In this sense, the play turns into the story of a struggle between Othello's Venetian identity and his pre-modern Moorish identity, with the latter prevailing towards the end: "that in Aleppo once, | Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk | Beat a Venetian" (*Othello*, V, 2, 137).

3 Tim Blade Nelson's *O* (2001)

Tim Blake Nelson's *O* is an appropriation of Shakespeare's *Othello*, which transposes the narrative content of the play to a new cultural context – the South of the USA at the turn of the millennia. The chronotopical shift refashions the themes of otherness, hybridity, projection of anxieties onto race, and the fickle nature of women. The film's main character, Odin, referred to as 'O', is the only African-American student in his high-school and is the top player of its basketball team. Like Othello, he is a case of hybridity since he overtly relinquishes his ghetto background, yet can never fully absorb the dominant white culture. As in the play, depending on each character's interests, Odin is regarded either as being 'a good boy' by his coach, who is nicknamed 'the Duke', or a rapist and drug user who has had trouble with the Police, by dean Brable. Unlike the play in which Othello is the only moor featured and the position of the radical other is occupied by the Turks, the film casts another African-American as the radical other: Dell, the drug dealer. In this case, Odin is left to fill the gap between the dominant white culture and the African American subculture.

In addition to the accounts of other characters, the film makes use of its own narrative affordances, such as the visual and aural mode, in order to render hybridity. For example, the love-making scene between Desi and Odin abounds in shots of the intertwining of Desi's white skin and Odin's black complexion. The beginning of the film features images of doves interrupted by that of a hawk soaring above the basketball ground, with Giuseppe Verdi's aria *Ave Maria*, from his opera *Otello*, playing in the background. This scene points to Odin's otherness, as well as his outstanding skills as a sportsman. Musically, hybridity is rendered by the cutting of *Ave Maria*, a symbol of white dominant culture, with Deep 6ix's *Bum Bum*, a subversive hardcore rap song, symbolising subversive alternative African American culture (Hodgdon 2003, 101).

One of the most important changes from Shakespeare's text to the screen and from early modern Europe to the American South of the turn of the millennia is the manner in which the characters relate to Othello's/Odin's hybridity. While western early modernity disavowed ambiguity, because it was associated with non-Christianity, superstition, pre-modernity and unruly passions, the white American youth culture of the early 2000s finds itself at the opposite pole and seems to fetishize rather than abhor hybridity. This fascination with hybridity dovetails with the conception of individualism that underpins the cultural identity of modern western white teenagers and young adults. Beginning with the second half of the twentieth century, youth culture seems to have adopted the defiance of social norms as a norm itself. Consequently, individuals who wish to assert their culture identity as young modern westerners often have to balance the need to comply with dominant social norms, but at the same time

must defy them to a moderate, acceptable degree. This means that many youngsters deliberately adopt the values and norms of subaltern cultural identities that would generally be considered out of tune with their cultural backgrounds. Young white middle-class Americans often become affiliated with a variety of subcultures that are created around a particular artistic movement that asserts the identity of various subaltern groups. *O* is representative of these cultural dynamics because it portrays the manner in which the white students of Alabama seem to be deeply immersed in African-American culture: they listen to gangsta rap at their parties, use African-American slang, and even buy drugs from an African-American drug dealer (Hodgdon 2003, 102).

The desire to be different in order to attain cultural capital is best exposed at the beginning of the film, when Hugo explains:

“All my life, I always wanted to fly. I always wanted to live like a hawk. I know you’re not supposed to be jealous of anything, but [...] to take flight, everything and everyone, now that’s living”. (Tim Blake Nelson, *O*. 2002. DVD, Lionsgate, 2’)

Judging from this point of view, Hugo’s evilness is first and foremost driven by envy – he is envious of Odin’s otherness and is dissatisfied with his sameness. Arguably, Hugo develops an inferiority complex due to the fact that, because he is just like everybody else but not like Odin, he is neglected by his father. A similar fascination with hybridity can be found in *Desi*. Before making love to Odin, she tells him to have her however he wishes, thus indulging in the phantasy of black men raping women (Burnett 2007, 69). Ironically, while throughout the film Odin tries to be white, all other characters around him try to be black.

While it may be tempting to claim that in this case white culture loses its dominant position, the film makes sure to remind the viewer that, although identities are liquid and heterogeneous, the power relations are still balanced in favour of WASP culture, and that the assertion of otherness is confined within the limits dictated by the ruling culture. The setting in which the plot unfolds is marked as inhospitable to African-Americans as Venice was to Othello. When Odin visits *Desi* at night, she is wearing an A-shirt with the Confederate flag on it. In their discussion *Desi* says she does not understand why she cannot use the word “nigger” since “[her] people invented the word”, thus alluding to the fact that even at its very core, African-American identity is indebted to the dominant white culture.

Secondly, despite the cultural capital that hybridity may have in the eyes of the ruling culture, one should not ignore the fact that this capital is valid only in as much as it can entertain the dominant white audience. Basketball, and hip hop music for that matter, are indeed a way of getting out of the ghetto, but this type of social mobility is institutionalised, approved

of, and supported by the dominant culture. Difference is to be manifested only within the confines of the stage, or within the “magic circle” (Huizinga 1949, 10) of the basketball court and by no means outside of them. Once difference steps out of the magic circle, punishment ensues. At one point during the film, Odin takes part in a slam dunk contest. Being infuriated by the suspicion of his lover’s betrayal, he performs his first dunk so violently that he bends the rim of basket. He then hits that basket’s backboard with the ball in order for the basket to fall and subsequently lifts the oval rim of the basket in front of the audience. The oval form of the rim suggests Odin’s asserting his identity outside the framework imposed by the dominant culture. When he does that, the cheering and applause turn into booing and hooting and he is “lucky he isn’t suspended”. It is also worth noting that the cloth covering the table of the jury has a Confederate flag pinned on it (fig. 1).



Figure 1. Tim Blake Nelson. *O*. 2002. DVD, ©Lionsgate

As with Shakespeare’s character, Odin is incapable of finding the right balance between his native culture and the ‘adoptive’ one. The more jealous he is, the more he confirms negative stereotypes about African-Americans. His love-making to Desi turns into rape, he indulges in the drugs given by Dell and Hugo, and, finally, he kills Desi in what resembles a school shooting scenario. In his final speech, Odin reminds one of Othello, who in the end admits that he could not tame his “Turk”.

Now, somebody here knows the truth. Somebody needs to tell the god-damn truth. My life is over. That’s it. But while you’re all out here living

yours, sitting around, talking about the nigger who lost it, back in high school, you make sure you tell them the truth. You tell them I loved that girl. I did. But I got played. He twisted my head up. He fucked it up. I ain't no different than none of y'all. My mom ain't no crack head. I wasn't no gangbanger. It wasn't some hood rat drug dealer that tripped me up. It was this white, prep school motherfucker standing right there.[...] You tell them where I'm from... didn't make me do this. (85')

Although Odin denies his difference and claims that his African-American identity did not motivate his action, his speech is undermined by the very language he uses. Each denial is expressed in African-American dialect, denying the very denial he expresses. His slang connotes the very identity he claims he does not have. Othello's Turk is Odin's language. Furthermore, after committing suicide, Odin is left in a position imitating a hawk with spread wings, thus reaffirming his difference. The final scene features the Police arresting Hugo and news reporters covering the events. The film suggests that the truth so feverishly invoked by Odin will always be mediated and filtered by the white dominant culture (Burnett 2007, 85).

While otherness and hybridity are at the core of the film, the issue of miscegenation has a somewhat ambiguous status. Although the action is set in the South, a region associated with discrimination against African-Americans, the film rarely alludes to pre-Civil War ideas about race. It would also be far-fetched to claim that the film is in any way essentialist. While Odin's last speech does prove that he is incapable of suppressing his cultural roots, nowhere is it implied that Odin acts the way he does because of some biological predetermination. The film's assumption seems to be that one's milieu exerts such a pressure on the individual that it is almost impossible for him or her to overcome it. Taking this assumption into account, Odin and Desi's relationship is frowned upon by the community because it brings together two cultural identities that for the South American dominant culture are irreconcilable.

While the issue of race in *O* lacks the philosophical underpinnings of Shakespeare's play, the views of Hugo with respect to femininity seem to be closer to the ones expressed by Iago. Hugo tells Odin that white women are "snaky. All right, they're horny snakes. They act like we're the ones who want sex, but they want it worse than us, man. They're just subtle about the way they go after it" (37'). This stereotypical image of women goes along the lines of the considerations on femininity expressed in early modern times. Without using the archaic notions of passions and motions, the film maintains the idea that women are driven by sensual needs rather than rational thought. Femininity, therefore, is yet another locus onto which the dominant culture can project its anxieties. Consequently, the love relationship between Odin and Desi is also troublesome because it intersects anxieties related both to race and gender.

4 Vishal Bhardwaj's *Omkara* (2006)

Omkara is a 2006 Bollywood appropriation of Shakespeare's *Othello*, directed by Vishal Bhardwaj. In this film the play's narrative is transposed to present day India. The role of Othello is assumed by Omkara, also referred to as Omi, who is a gangster in the service of an influential local political leader called Bhaisaab and whose job is to eliminate Bhaisaab's political rivals. While in *Othello*, hybridity relies on the hero's ethnic and religious in-betweenness, in *Omkara* hybridity is redefined as the protagonist's class liminality. Omkara is a half-caste because his father belonged to an upper caste, while his mother to an inferior one. The manner in which the film approaches hybridity differs from the one found in the play. While Othello's conduct is marked by an internal struggle between his native pre-modern self and his modern adoptive cultural identity, Omi's behaviour is not determined by his hybridity but rather by his identity as a murderer. His downfall is not caused by the conflict between two contradictory cultures that find in the character their liminal space, so there is no struggle between a pre-modern and a modern self that is decisively influenced by the intervention of jealousy. While in Shakespeare's play and in *O* jealousy is the element that overturns the balance in favour of the 'dark,' 'barbaric' side of the character, in *Omkara* jealousy turns from pretext into actual motivation. For Omkara, killing Dolly simply means committing another murder, with the difference that this time there were also personal motives involved.

By replacing ethnic otherness with class alterity, the film precludes some of the anxieties present in *Othello* and *O*. Omkara is no longer suspected of using spells and/or drugs in order to woo Desdemona (Dolly), but the film does, nevertheless, manage to include this motif of the original by visually referencing previous, more faithful, adaptations of the play. If *O* refers to Verdi's *Otello*, Omkara has an intertextual relation with Orson Welles's *Othello*. In Welles's 1951 production, when Othello explains to the duke and the senator how he had made Desdemona love him, the director chooses to focus on Othello's face and follow it through a tracking shot as the character moves, in order to emphasise the character's mesmerising eyes (fig. 2). The antithesis between the aural and visual discourse suggests the idea of hybridity and ambivalence - while Othello disclaims having used magic, he enchants his audience with his gaze. In the same scene in Bhardwaj's film, the camera zooms in on Omkara's mesmerising eyes as he tells Bhaisaab (the Duke) and Dolly's father that he did not force Dolly in any way (fig. 3). Then, after Dolly admits having eloped with Omkara, the film shows her memories of how she and Omkara had come to love one another. These recollections are accompanied by a song in the background that emphasises the same motif of the bewitching eyes: "Don't look in his eyes | Don't listen to them | His eyes will deceive you | They'll mesmerize you while you're awake" (17').



Figure 2. Orson Welles. *Othello*. 1999. DVD, © Image Entertainment



Figure 3. Vishal Bhardwaj. *Omkara*. 2007. DVD, © Eros Entertainment

The theme of the play that the adaptation focuses on is that of miscegenation, which is transposed, refashioned and appropriated to fit the Indian context, where younger couples reject the custom of arranged marriage and marry out of love. According to traditional Hindu culture,

each and every individual has his/her place well-fixed in social and especially in the case hierarchy [...]. That goes as far as assuming that even

criminals have their part to play in the big drama of the universe [...] precisely written down in the divine laws of the universe. This explains the importance of arranged marriages as bonds meant to strengthen the family as a group rather than as individual alliances. [...] While no marriage is expected to work if it does not have the family blessing, love is expected to be not the cause of marriage but the outcome of it. (Draga-Alexandru 2010, 197)

By adopting agency and marrying Omkara in spite of her father's decision that she should marry Rujju, Dolly rejects traditional Hindu culture and adopts a modern identitarian model that treasures individualism and self-determination above tradition and family/caste bonds. Therefore, it is safe to say that Vishal Bhardwaj translates/adapts/appropriates the Shakespearean theme of miscegenation and makes use of Shakespeare's cultural prestige to undermine the dominant discourse on marriage. Evidently, the tag 'Shakespeare', which is also present on the theatrical poster and the DVD cover of the film, makes the theme of marriage out of love acceptable to the dominant Hindu culture. Had it not been for the cultural capital of the canonical writer, the theme would have either spawned waves of criticism or been censored. As Andre Lefevere argues,

The translation of literature, then, must be heavily regulated because it is potentially - and often actually - subversive, precisely because it offers a cover for the translator to go against the dominant constraints of his or her time, not in his or her own name which, in most cases, would not happen to be all that well known anyway, but rather in the name of, and relying on the authority of a writer who is considered great enough in another literature so as not to be ignored in one's own, at least not if one wants to safeguard that literature against provincialism and other forms of atrophy. (1985, 237-8)

Such political workings are applicable to adaptations, as well, since, in a sense, adaptations presuppose not only a transposition from one medium to another, but also imply accommodating the norms of the target culture. However, sometimes adaptations, such as the one discussed in this section, may only pretend to adopt the norms of the target culture, whereas, in fact, the aim is to reform them.

5 Conclusion

To sum up, Shakespeare's *Othello* is a play that stresses early modern anxieties with respect to otherness - be they racial, religious or related to gender. Othello is a character seeking to fashion a coherent narrative that can

incorporate both his sameness and his otherness. However, his endeavour will prove to be a failure, as revealed in the play's denouement where his cultural roots eventually prevail and his appetitive side, referred to as the Turk, take hold of his rational side, referred to as the Venetian. *O* transposes Othello's identitarian conflict and adapts it to the American context of the turn of the millennia. Othello's struggle to bridle the passions becomes Odin's struggle to leave behind his African-American ghetto background. Yet, unlike the play in which otherness is fully rejected, the film sheds light upon the status of difference in the commodified entertainment-gearred youth culture. Odin's success is assured by his ability to entertain, which is intimately related to his ethnic otherness. However, whilst contemporary American society does accept difference, this can be manifested only on the terms dictated by the dominant culture. Odin's attempt to break free from the power relations imposed by the ruling white group lead to failure: he is not allowed to be different outside the basketball court, and the truth of his story depends on the global media which is owned and run by the same dominant group. *Omkara* too downplays the tragic hero's inner struggle so that it may better focus on the class and gender constraints imposed by traditional Hindu culture. By appropriating and adapting the theme of miscegenation to the Indian context, the film undermines the dominant traditional practice of arranged marriages and, instead, supports modern marriages founded on the love of the two would-be spouses.

The films investigated in this article reveal Shakespeare's status as a global, transnational figure that can be adapted to a variety of local cultures and historical contexts. Shakespeare's *Othello* seems to provide a ready-made narrative recipe onto which various cultures can project their own values, tensions, and norms. Shakespeare's plays, including *Othello*, have become cultural battlegrounds where local tensions are disputed and resolved. Moreover, the multitude of ways in which Shakespeare's plays are repurposed is indicative of a liquid (post)modern post-industrial condition of a global culture where top-down power relations are increasingly being contested by bottom-up modes of production. Instead of moving closer to the canon, contemporary audiences bring the canon closer to themselves through adaptations and appropriations in which audiences refashion the canon in accordance with their own expectations.

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