

# XENOPHOBIA IN SHAKESPEARE'S THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Farideh Alizadeh<sup>1</sup>

Mohd Nasir Hashim<sup>2</sup>

Rahmat Amini<sup>3</sup>

Fatemh Mohtadi<sup>4</sup>

## Abstract

The word xenophobia is a social phenomenon that is rooted in fear and dislike of strangers from other countries. Since art is a reflection of life, this social behaviour has been echoed in dramatic literature. Shakespeare's plays as a beacon of classic drama, are samples of this reflection. *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, *The Tempest*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Antony and Cleopatra* are classical examples of xenophobic reactions within societies toward aliens that are still very tangible. *The Merchant of Venice* is the most prominent work in terms of presenting foreign characters, different religions and groups. Therefore, this article attempts to identify xenophobia in behaviours of characters in *The Merchant of Venice*, so as to prove that the bases of xenophobia have not changed from the time of Shakespeare, and it has same roots. Social theories such as in-group, out-group and integrated threat theory ITT alongside analysis of the dialogues and events in *The Merchant of Venice* specify that elements like economy or Judaism can create conflicts and manifest as xenophobia in the play.

**Keywords:** Integrated threat theory (ITT), In-group, Out-group, Xenophobia, The Merchant of Venice, Shakespeare

## Introduction

William Shakespeare encountered new events in his time, including England's commercial relationships with Muslim countries, the discovery of new lands in America and the growing presence of immigrants from different nations alongside political events (Watt, Holzknacht and Ross 1969: 23; Hodges 2008: 56). Strangers from different nations entering London in Shakespeare's time, experienced various reactions from the English people and Elizabeth I, and this is reflected in the Bard's plays (Binda 2010: 58). Such reactions resulted in negative presumptions towards different nations based on reasons like fear of losing historical background, or loss of economic and social opportunities, thereby leading to protests against foreign immigrants. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare captures all the real events that occurred at that time, with various roots of xenophobia exposed.

Goose believed that the creation of characters such as Shylock, Othello, Caliban, Cleopatra and Aaron was a reflection of Britain's fear of foreigners. The common aspect of all main characters of these plays is that they are all foreigners, who are different from Europeans, in terms of ethnicity.

Although the word "Xenophobia" was not discussed in English Renaissance as openly as in modern times, this phenomenon existed in Shakespeare's works and it was mentioned in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Goose 2005: 110-111). According to Akokpari, xenophobia is an act of fear of strangers. It is based on racial, cultural and religious prejudices that can lead to preventive behaviours, fanaticism and removing "The Other". Despite the similarities between xenophobia and racism, they are still considered as two different phenomena. Racism is usually classified on the basis of stereotypical prejudices towards one's race or physical features such as skin colour and facial expressions. However, xenophobia is based on behaviours in which "The Other" is an individual different from the community, and originates from another country (Akokpari 2000: 72-92).

Despite the fact that all the aforementioned plays have elements of xenophobia, the basis of xenophobia in the behaviour of characters is more clearly exposed in *The Merchant of Venice*.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, religious prejudice, economic opportunities and ethnicity form the basis of xenophobia, in a way that different characters consider Shylock not only a threat to common patterns in the commercial system and capital profit, but also a physical threat to the life of Antonio. The Venetians talk about Shylock as a cruel individual without mercy.

Jessica, Shylock's Christian daughter, also experiences xenophobic behaviour, as society views her in the same way as her father. Other characters in *The Merchant of Venice* that have different ethnicities also provide a different picture of the strangers who break the societal order.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, residents of Venice and Belmont considered Shylock and other strangers a threat to their values, reflecting some type of xenophobic factors, such as economic and political crisis and increased immigration, that were common in the Shakespearean period. The mental approach to this social phenomenon can be explained using sociological theories. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to identify evidence of xenophobia in *The Merchant of Venice* by using modern and related theories of in-group, out-group dynamics and Integrated Threat Theory (ITT) to show that xenophobic behaviours have been in existence from as far back as the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

### **In-group, Out-group, ITT**

In-group is a group of people who have common interests and activities, and do not allow members of other groups to enter their group as a means of protecting their territory. Out-group is a group of people who are separated from their own group, and usually experience rage and dislike as a group of people who do not belong to a certain community, especially when they are humiliated because of their differences. The implication theories presented here suggest that people categorise themselves into groups which Tajfel called 'in-groups', and categorise everyone else under other groups, called 'out-groups'. This categorisation helps to promote a sense of identity, but leads to unhealthy comparisons between the in-group and the out-group as well as the enforcement of boundaries between the groups which can result in different forms of conflicts (Tajfel 1974: 66; Reicher, Haslam and Spears 2011: 55-62).

Shylock, Jessica or Prince of Morocco and Prince of Aragon are some of the people from the out-group with different opinions on trade or relationships that create a conflict in terms of the two norms with the in-group people in the Venetian society.

Integrated Threat Theory (ITT) which was proposed by Walter S. Stephan & Cookie White Stephan (2000), highlights the conditions and situations that results in the formation of prejudice, as well as the creation of threat and fear in-group behaviour. Such threats are there at any time, challenging the behaviour and beliefs of the in-group (people of Venice) and making them perceive the out-group (Shylock) as a threat to the security of their group. Members of the in-group can project and indicate evil aspects of the out-group to improve their image (Stephan and Stephan 2000: 23-45). They categorised the foundation of the model in four types of threats that result in prejudice. These four types of threats are; Realistic Threats, Symbolic Threats, Negative Stereotypes, and Intergroup Anxiety.

Realistic threats are mainly economic, physical and political (Velasco González, et al. 2008: 667-685; Stephan and Stephan 2000: 25; Bizman and Yinon 2010: 191; Stephen M. et al. 2013: 1). In *The Merchant of Venice*, the character of Antonio is different from that of Shylock (the Jew), who is from a different economic and social background. Shylock is Antonio's commercial competitor in lending money.

Symbolic threats involve perceived differences in values, beliefs, standards and attitudes (Stephan and Stephan 1996: 409-426). Out-groups (minority groups) often have differing worldviews from dominant groups. Symbolic

threats from minority or immigrant groups are related to negative attitudes towards minorities or immigrants (Stephen M, et al. 2013: 1; Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007: 145). In fact, symbolic threat appears when the in-group believes that its beliefs and values are endangered by the out-group. The threat starts with the formation of the belief that the in-group system of values is endangered.

Stereotypes are expectations of how a member of an out-group will behave. Negative stereotypes are related to feelings of threat and fear (Verkuyten 1997: 261-284). For example, in many parts of *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock, a "Jewish moneylender" (Shakespeare 1989: 404), is considered as a devil's incarnate, wolf and dog. Other foreign characters in Shakespeare's plays, like Othello is seen as a thick lips Moor, as a sorcerer and a barbarian, while Caliban in *The Tempest* who is a slave to Prospero, is described as the spawn of the devil. Aron is the source of all the evil deeds and Cleopatra is a symbol of East and she is a threat to the city of Rome by seducing Anthony.

Intergroup anxiety is the fear people have when interacting with out-group members. Prejudice increases as intergroup anxiety increases (Page-Gould, Mendes and Major 2010: 854-858; Islam and Hewstone 1993: 700-710). Intergroup anxiety is a feeling of being personally threatened during interactions with out-group members, whereas realistic threats, symbolic threats, and stereotypes are directed at the in-group (Tausch, et al. 2007: 541-556). All foreign characters in Shakespeare's plays earlier mentioned have a sense of intergroup anxiety, which is a feeling of being detached from the in-group. Even characters, like Jessica who entered this group cannot distance herself from her Jewish roots.

### Roots of Xenophobia in Shakespeare's Period

Spain's defeat by England in 1588, and the increase in Elizabeth I's power in Europe, had earlier prompted the efforts to discover new lands in America, and developed trade and political ties with the Ottoman Empire and African countries; a form of nationalism started to evolve among British settlers (Suratgar 1994: 235). After Elizabeth I came to power, immigrants from different backgrounds, such as Jews, Muslims and even gypsies increasingly settled in Britain. Deportation and abuse of Jews and Muslims from Spain was also prominent at that time. During this acquisition of Spain, the recapturing of Granada from Muslims and initiation of 'Reconquista' was intensified. Reconquista was an initiative aimed at harmonizing different nationalities together with the majority Christian community; this also gave rise to racism (Loomba 2002: 114). This kind of opinion was prevalent in most European countries such as Spain and Portugal. However, in England, Muslim and Jewish immigrants, as well as settlers from North Africa experienced better treatment because of the power of Protestants and their inclination to develop the sovereignty of Britain. British public opinion about different nations was formed by reading different travel accounts, books and historical-religious background. However, the fear of being attacked by strangers and losing its newly obtained power, fostered the bloody struggles and abuse of immigrants that resulted from incorrect prejudice and economic competition between England and foreigners (Goose 2005: 110-111). Therefore, such small immigrant groups lived in isolation and were considered the other or aliens (Shapiro 1996: 6). These trends of events are still similar in current times.

Shapiro argues that intensified political riots, unemployment and religious prejudices in England, affected the lives of immigrants under colonial powers who considered them as threats against their sovereignty. For this reason, immigrants were deprived from their rights as citizens. As prejudices against immigrants in England grew, the promise of new life for Jews was broken and Queen Elizabeth I ordered the deportation of Jewish people in 1593, declaring that no Jew could enter England. The order was maintained till 1656. Any Jew entering England in the period between Late Sixteenth to early Seventeenth century was referred to as an alien (Shapiro 1996: 203). Experiences of commerce and travel accounts by English explorers, including Tomas Coryate (c. 1577 - 1617), on the other hand, brought the European community an exaggerated stereotype of Jews, along with the concept of xenophobia.

Jews who were deported from European countries migrated to Africa and Asia, such that, more than 250,000 Jews were living in the Ottoman Empire, where they were not only successful merchants, but also occupied governmental authority. They were noncompliant competitors of English merchants who were also trying to stabilise their position in the region. Many English merchants believed that making these merchants Christian would help them achieve their goal. Many Jews of Venice were in fact the merchants of the Ottoman Empire (Shapiro 1996: 177). This attitude is seen at the time of Christianising Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, in Act 4, scene 1.

The idea of xenophobia in the Shakespearean period was influenced by the stereotypes formed in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance. Loomba refers to stereotypes given to the Jews in her book: "Jews had hooky nose, and were accused of killing children in religious ceremonies, poisoning Christians, circumcising Christians and exploiting

Christians economically through usury. Such prejudices manifested in different times and places in various forms" (Loomba 2002: 114). Cutting one pound of Antonio's flesh in *The Merchant of Venice* may be a reflection of the rumour about Jews regarding circumcision and sacrifice. Shapiro believed that for the closed Jewish community in Elizabethan England, the idea formed among the public that the ritual could be part of 'human sacrifice', while in the early Renaissance, discouraging concepts of the ritual was propagated in Europe, indicating the religious, racial and sexual anxiety that intensified in the Elizabethan period (Shapiro 1996: 143).

Confrontation between the English community and Muslim immigrants was based on the development of the Ottoman Empire and the historical background of the Crusades, which indicated Islamophobia and increased anxiety about this external source of power. Therefore, the English started to project the image of Muslims and Moors through exaggerated narrations. Such negative perceptions about Muslim immigrants as liars and untrustworthy people were considered as threat against their security. Some examples of the negative attitudes are reflected in the Shakespeare plays. Othello as well as Caliban in *The Tempest* and the Prince of Morocco in *The Merchant of Venice*, Aron in *Titus* and Cleopatra from North African countries are such examples. Matar believed that bargains among African Muslim, Ottoman Turks, and the Britons in Elizabethan England had a significant influence, and because none of the nations were residing in Britain, Muslims were considered strangers of a certain identity (Matar 2000: 26).

Therefore, as Loomba writes, the English looked at Muslims from a place of fear and praise, as a result of the background of the Crusades and the economic power of the Ottoman Empire (Loomba 2002: 125). Such a specific view of Muslims is reflected in the character of the Moroccan prince in *The Merchant of Venice*. From the eyes of other characters these foreigners indicate negative beliefs of the British towards Muslims and Moors. It has been suggested that Abd el-Ouahed ben Messaoud, who was the Moorish ambassador of the Barbary States to the Court of Queen Elizabeth I in 1600, may have inspired the character of William Shakespeare's Moorish hero, Othello (Shapiro 1996: 6).

Matar believed that confrontation of the Muslims by the English community was based on cultural differences, geographical differences and social status (merchant, pirate, soldier, and slave) (Matar 2000: 116).

## Reflection of Xenophobia in Shakespeare's drama

The period of the reign of Elizabeth I, was a period of prosperity in England as well as the golden period of literature in this country. At this time, theatre was the most important means of communication, and theatre was a place to reflect all common events in the community and the governing sensation (Hodges 2008: 78). As earlier mentioned, immigration to England brought about xenophobic reaction, and theatre as a media reflected this phenomenon.

Shakespeare as one of the biggest writers in his time portrayed the phenomenon in his plays delicately despite censor committees and prohibition of speaking about religion and politics (Brockett and Hildy 2010; Stewart 1973: 56). It has been stated that Shakespeare is not racist and is only explaining the events of tension and prejudices during the era of Elizabeth I. (Shapiro 1996: 203).

Factors of xenophobia are seen in five works of Shakespeare; *Othello*, *The Tempest*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *The Merchant of Venice*. Among these dramas, there are aliens or strangers from different religious minorities, ethnicities or skin colour, which are considered as threats against social or political situation or even as danger for the survival of the majority (in-group). Fear of immigrants and stranger's power (out-group) were prominent in the Shakespearean period.

Although common within the Shakespearean period, marriage of a black and a white person was considered despicable, as reflected in *Othello*. According to reflection on in-group and out-group in Shakespeare's works, the marriage of Othello and Desdemona is considered as one that is abnormal and based on carnality. Therefore, the marriage is a threat to social values of the community and a starting point for xenophobia in characters such as Iago and Barbantio. In *The Tempest*, Caliban, a rebelling slave, is a threat against the governing power and sovereignty of Prospero. In the island of the new world for the European Prospero, Caliban is specified to be a stranger, uncivilised man and barbarian who is a saboteur that hesitates to carry out Prospero's orders. Aron and Tamora, Queen of Goths, are foreign threats to authority of Titus general of Rome. They are seen as outsiders, bloodthirsty people that are lower than Romans, so in order to end this threat, Aaron is buried alive. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the power of Rome was manipulated by seductions of Cleopatra, the queen of Egypt. The power of the East (Egypt) overshadows the power of West (Rome) and this threat can only be vanquished by Cleopatra's suicide.

As earlier mentioned, in *The Merchant of Venice*, these social behaviours are fully manifested, thereby making the play more specific in terms of xenophobia. Shylock is a threat against the economic and physical security of Antonio, while characters such as the Prince of Morocco and the Spanish Prince of Aragon bring the risk of strangers' domination over the economic power and values of a community. Shakespeare considers and emphasises the subject

of commerce which was in the hands of other races. He also focuses on Jews and confrontation with other races, such that the economic power of the nation is threatened by such races. Stereotypes and rumours connected with the Jews and other nationalities are highlighted in the behaviours of other in-group characters.

## The Merchant of Venice

Bassanio, is in need of three thousand ducats loan for a marriage proposal to Portia, a wealthy heiress in Belmont. Therefore, he approaches his friend Antonio, a Venetian merchant. Antonio is short of money due to investment of all his wealth in his fleet at the sea. So Antonio asks a Jewish money lender, Shylock, who hates Antonio because of his insulting treatments towards him as a Jewish man, and his commercial strategy. However, Shylock agrees to give him the loan which must be repaid in three months, or Shylock will cut a pound of flesh from Antonio. Antonio agrees, knowing that his ships will return in time. As Bassanio prepares to travel to Belmont for the test, his friend Lorenzo elopes with Shylock's daughter, Jessica, who agrees to convert to Christianity in order to marry Lorenzo.

In Belmont, Portia is bound to her father's will and all suitors must choose from among three caskets, one of which contains a portrait of her. Anyone who chooses the right one may marry Portia. The Princes of Morocco and Arragon of Spain failed the test and were rejected. Bassanio chooses the lead casket, which contains her picture, and Portia happily agrees to marry him immediately.

Meanwhile, two of Antonio's ships have been wrecked and Antonio's creditors are seeking him for repayment. Word comes to Bassanio about Antonio's challenge, and he gets back to Venice, leaving Portia behind. Portia and her maid follow him, disguised as a male lawyer and his clerk. By the time Bassanio arrives the deadline for Shylock's loan has passed so the Jew is demanding his pound of flesh. Even when Bassanio offers much more than the amount in repayment, Shylock is enraged by the loss of his daughter and seeks revenge.

Portia arrives in her disguise to defend Antonio at court. Given the authority of judgment by the Duke of Venice, Portia decides that Shylock can have the pound of flesh as long as he does not draw blood, as it is against the law to shed a Christian's blood. Since it is obvious that to draw a pound of flesh would kill Antonio, Shylock is denied his case. Moreover, for conspiring to murder a Venetian citizen, Portia orders that he should forfeit all his wealth. Half is to go to Venice, and half to Antonio.

Antonio gives his half back to Shylock on the condition that Shylock gives it to his disinherited daughter, Jessica who has married a Christian. Shylock must also convert to Christianity. Shylock accepts the terms.

Based on this drama, the relationship between religion and commerce is an important factor, projecting that the economic power of other nations is a reason to be afraid of them. A reflection of xenophobia in *The Merchant of Venice* is manifested in some characters. Suitors of Portia, the Prince of Argon and the Prince of Morocco are both portrayed as silly and proud. It should be noted that in the drama, the other foreign suitors of Portia are all ridiculed by her. The Prince of Argon and the Prince of Morocco are strangers (out-group), rivals and opponents; the first is from Spain, the in-compliant enemy of England, and the second is a non-Christian, and both are threats against either Belmont's (in-group) power and wealth or the Protestant community of England.

As the marriage of a Christian to a non-Christian in the Shakespearean period was forbidden (Loomba, 2002: 125), Jessica, Shylock's daughter, could marry Lorenzo only after being converted to Christianity, but because of her Jewish background (out-group), she is ridiculed by Launcelot, who tells her that marriage to a Christian does not release her from hell. Reflections of xenophobia among the characters and their reaction to strangers can be seen in the following dialogues:

*Lancelot : the sins of the father are to be laid upon the children. Therefore be o' good cheer, for truly I think you are damned.*

*Act III Scene V*

The dialogue indicates in some way the anger of Britons for losing different opportunities, including economic and professional opportunities to immigrants and minorities.

*Jessica : I shall be saved by my husband. He hath made me a Christian*

*Lancelot: Truly, the more to blame he. We were Christians eno' before, e'en as many as could well live one by another. This making Christians will raise the price of hogs. If we grow all to be pork-eaters, we shall not shortly have a rasher on the coals for money.*

*Act III Scene I*

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock as the pivotal or secondary character of the story, portrays the culmination of fear and xenophobia against Jews and talks about discrimination in Christian community against him: Shylock: you repeatedly called me pagan and brutal dog and spited on my Jewish clothing (Shakespeare 1989: 410). Shylock believed that Jews, who have two eyes and hands like Christians, also have the same feeling, so they have the right to take revenge.

### **Shylock, The Merchant of Venice and Xenophobia**

In *The Merchant of Venice*, confrontation with the minority Jewish community is manifested by showing fear from negative stereotypes about the other (Shylock, the Jew). Shylock is defined by audiences as a vengeful, greedy, cunning, and cruel person, with Christian characters in *The Merchant of Venice* referring to him as the devil, fiend, dog, and wolf. They always called him Jewish in most dialogues and seldom used his name, Shylock.

*Antonio: Mark you this, Bassanio, The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose. An evil soul producing holy witness Is like a villain with a smiling cheek, A goodly apple rotten at the heart: O, what a goodly outside falsehood hath!*

*Act IV Scene I*

*Launcelot: If we use the conscious as our guide, I should remain the Jew my master, who is a type of evil and I hope our Lord protect me against him.*

*Act I Scene III*

In another part Solanio says:

*It is the most impenetrable cur. That ever kept with men.*

*Act III Scene V*

Considering these stereotypes, the Jewish character, Shylock (out-group), became a threat, and later in the drama, his request for cutting a pound of flesh from Antonio's chest changed from a mere threat into an offensive operation, increasing the fear of a Venetian citizen (in-group) towards a stranger (Shylock).

*Antonio: it is clear that there would not be a pound of meat in my body for my savaging claimant.*

*Act III Scene III*

The economy is another factor reflecting xenophobia, because the severity of this competition as a threat is clear in Shylock's dialogues.

*Shylock: if he may breach his obligation, I would take out his heart.*

*Act III Scene III*

Shylock represents the traditional economy, while Antonio, whose ships left for Tripoli and the Indian Islands, is the symbol of the new and aggressive economy of the Elizabethan era. As Shylock says, his wealth is uncertain and hypothetical (Lupton 1997)

*He ridicules me, my transactions and the profit I have worked to get, which he calls usury.*

*Act IV Scene I*

However, Shylock considers the profit rate of Antonio a threat. Therefore in this economic competition that depends on capital of minorities (out-group), Shylock is discriminated and economy is an effective element that overshadows power. In the end it is a world of business competition and Shylock faces a threat by Antonio's new approach to interest rates, therefore Shylock is against the economic approach of the Venetian society.

*Shylock: I hate him for he is a Christian, But more for that in low simplicity. He lends out money gratis and brings down. The rate of usance here with us in Venice.*

*Act I Scene III*

Then, at the end, with the victory of Portia in the court, Antonio asks Shylock to convert to Christianity and that his wealth to be transferred to the newly baptised Jessica and her husband, Lorenzo, which indicates some type of monarchy of the Christian governing power over Judaism in the Shakespearean period and the destruction of any threat from strangers.

*Portia: Wait, the Jews, the Law has another claim against you. According to Venice law, if a stranger may directly or indirectly plot to kill a citizen, half of his assets should be attached by one who had been subjected under such plot and the other half is given to the treasury.*

*Act I Scene III*

Based on the above facts, the factors influencing xenophobia arise from a dogmatic approach towards strangers and immigrants. Then, defensive and vengeful reactions toward religious minorities and strangers can be seen in the characters' dialogue and dramatic events. Regarding the Integrated Threat Theory, which describes the factors forming prejudice and xenophobia, dialogues in *The Merchant of Venice* conform with this sociological approach, and thus, the play is a suitable model to compare and analyse this approach in relation to xenophobia.

### *Conformity of The Merchant of Venice with Integrated Threat Theory (ITT)*

As indicated in figure 1 and figure 2, four kinds of threats influence the formation of prejudice, racism and xenophobia. In realistic threats, the Jewish character Shylock and Portia's suitors (The Prince of Morocco and the Prince of Aragon) were threats against the economic and political power of Venice, respectively. Shylock, with his different profit rate, was a clear threat and competitor to the economic activities of Antonio. The act of cutting a pound of flesh from Antonio's chest was a realistic threat against his physical life. According to the law on the transfer of a wife's wealth with her marriage, which was common in the Shakespearean period, two foreign characters, the Prince of Morocco and the Prince of Aragon, were threats against wealth transfer in the Belmont economy; this would give the strangers more power, and was considered a political threat.

*In symbolic threat, Shylock, with his physical threat, explains Christian fears and beliefs that  
Jesus was crucified by the Jews.*

*Act III Scene I*

As marriage between black and white, and Christian with non-Christian was forbidden in the Shakespearean period, the Prince of Morocco, as a black and a Muslim, also seems to be a symbolic threat.

Jessica, Shylock's daughter was not considered to be a Christian despite being converted and married to Lorenzo, and was ridiculed by Launcelot for her Jewish roots with the belief that the baptism of Jessica does not make her free from hell (Shakespeare 1989: 392). He disapproves of her, and she is considered a stranger who is taking advantage of social opportunities and Christian benefits. Therefore, the social behaviour of Christians towards Jessica indicates the xenophobic approach based on in-group anxiety. Negative stereotypes are considered one of the four threats influencing xenophobia in *The Merchant of Venice*. Each of the foreigners or immigrant characters, such as Shylock, the Prince of Morocco and the Prince of Aragon had a negative stereotype; they were perceived as cunning, vengeful, brutal, cruel, ignorant and proud. All of these were types of threats against social interactions that distracted the normal functioning of a European society.

### **Conclusion**

Xenophobia is often more obvious in societies with immigrant communities and cultural gaps. It is also a defensive behaviour that is obvious in refugee crisis in our current times, and can be traced back to dramatic literatures such as *The Merchant of Venice*. Xenophobia is considered as a challenge which leads to prejudice, violence and racism. This phenomenon targets religious minorities and immigrants. Therefore, this play, which contains religious and racial minorities is a remarkable model that reflects Xenophobia. By analysing the dialogues and events in *The Merchant of Venice*, it is clear that economy, commercial competition and Judaism are the most perceptible elements of group conflict in this play, thereby fostering xenophobia among the dramatic characters. Foreign characters in *The Merchant of Venice* are more suitable for classification as in-group and out-group than in other plays by Shakespeare.

The element of xenophobia in *The Merchant of Venice* is more distinguished, as the main character is more tangible and the threat to Antonio's life is more vivid than in conflicts between Caliban and Prospero, or Othello against Iago. Othello's marriage with Desdemona is being rebuked, and Iago is seen as being jealous of the power of a Moor. In *The Tempest*, Prospero is threatened by Caliban who is perceived as someone who can acquire power, therefore resulting in the aggression of Prospero. However, this situation is more intense in *The Merchant of Venice* to the extent that Shylock's threat to the life of Antonio goes beyond a simple conflict.

Shakespeare indicates religious, ethnic conflict and increased nationalism in his well-known dialogues. Where foreign characters are considered as obstacle in business progress, causing commotion in the community and family. Thus, the fear of losing the benefits results into conspiracy and felony. By reviewing such defensive approaches toward strangers, we can see a basic social behaviour toward a group of people that are different from the majority in this



play. *The Merchant of Venice* is like a laboratory where all the elements of xenophobia can be comprehended through literature, and it creates an opportunity to read it using a social and psychological approach.

Summary of the result is described using two figures. Figure 1 depicts the influence of xenophobia, *symbolic threat* and *real threat* to the characters of Shylock, Prince of Morocco and Portia's suitors. Subsequently, Figure 2 demonstrates another effect of integrated threat theory (ITT) such as *negative stereotype* and *intergroup anxiety* in *The Merchant of Venice*.

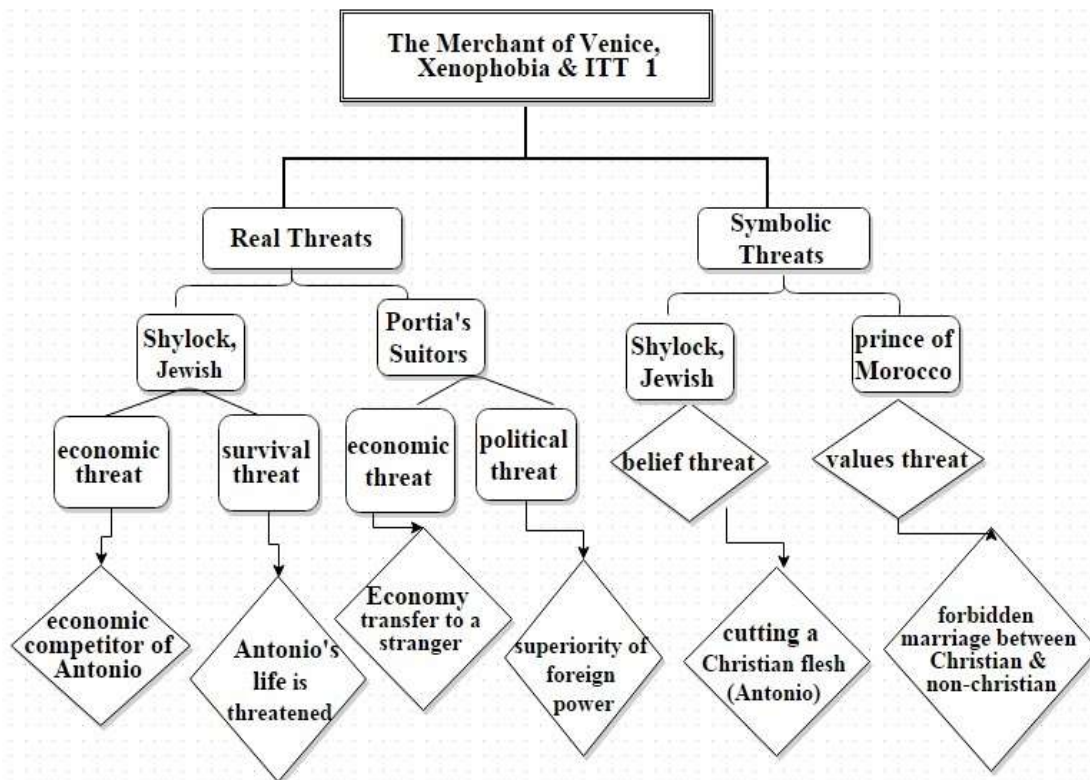


Figure 1: Features of xenophobia in *The Merchant of Venice* according to the ITT (Real Threats & Symbolic Threat)

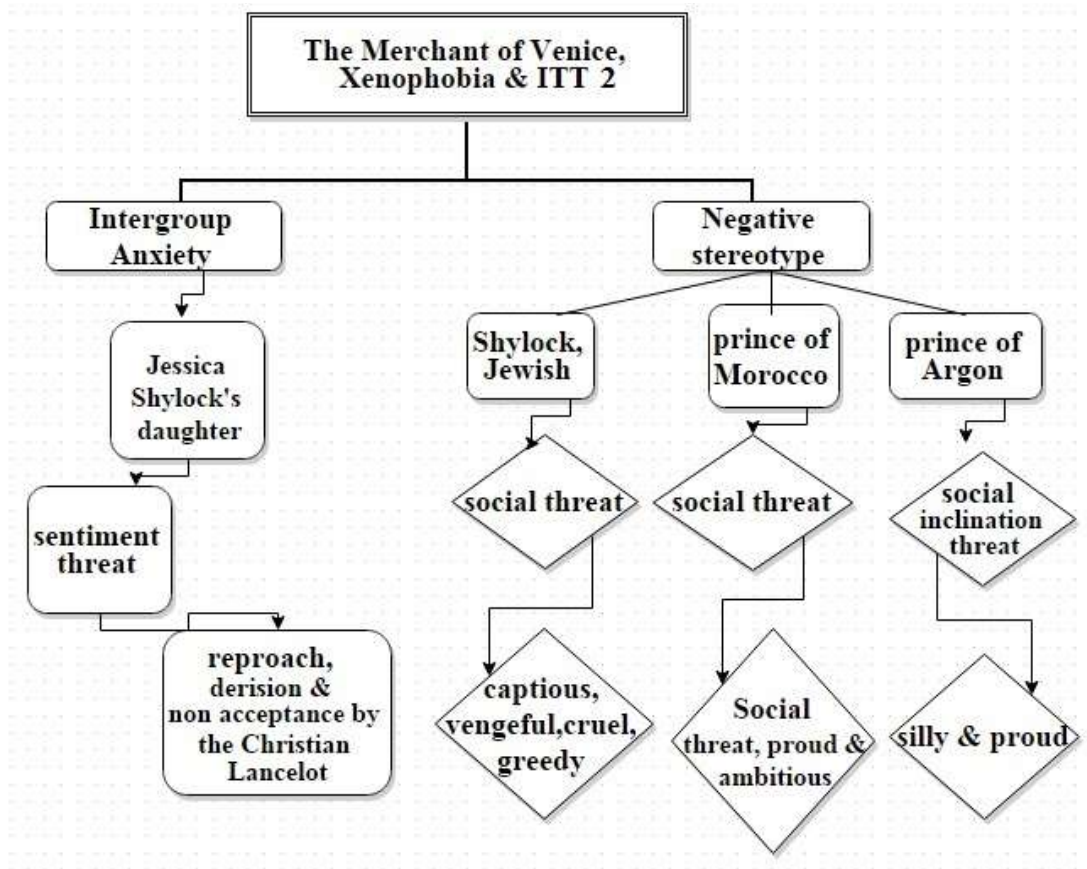


Figure 2: Feature of xenophobia in *The Merchant of Venice* according to the ITT (Intergroup Anxiety & Negative Stereotype)

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Cultural Centre, University of Malaya (UM), Jalan Universiti, 50603, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Email: farideh@um.edu.my. (Corresponding Author)

<sup>2</sup> Cultural Centre, University of Malaya (UM), Jalan Universiti, 50603, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Email: [nasirhashim@um.edu.my](mailto:nasirhashim@um.edu.my).

<sup>3</sup> Drama Department, School of Performing Arts & Music, University of Tehran (UT), Iran. Email: rahmatamini@ut.ac.ir. (Corresponding Author)

<sup>4</sup> Faculty of Arts & Architecture Islamic Azad University Central Tehran Branch (IAU), Tehran, Iran. Email: [fatemehmohhtadi80@yahoo.com](mailto:fatemehmohhtadi80@yahoo.com).

## References

- Akokpari, John K. 2000. Globalisation and Migration. *African Sociological Review*, 4 (2), 72-92.
- Bizman, Aharon & Yinon, Yoel. 2001. Intergroup and Interpersonal Threats as Determinants of Prejudice: The Moderating Role of In-Group Identification. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 23(3), 191-196
- Brockett, Oscar G. & Hildy, Franklin J. 2010. *History of the Theatre*. 10<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston, Mass, London: Pearson Allyn and Bacon.

- Binda, Hilary J. 2010. Shakespeare and Tolerance (Cambridge UP). *The Journal of Early Modern Studies*, 41 (3), 625-27.
- Croucher, Stephen M. , et al. 2013. Prejudice toward American Muslims: An Integrated Threat Analysis.. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, 14 (32), (July), 1-8
- Goose, Nigel. 2005. *Immigrants in Tudor and Early Stuart England*. United Kingdom: Sussex Academic Press Eastbourne.
- Hodges, C. Walter. 2008. *Shakespeare's Theater*, T. Pollard, Editor. New York: Putnam Pub Group.
- Islam, Mir Rabiul, & Hewstone, Miles. 1993. Dimensions of Contact as Predictors of Intergroup Anxiety, Perceived Out-group Variability, and Out-group Attitude: An Integrative Model. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 19 (6), 700-710.
- Loomba, Ania. 2002. *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism*, P.H.S. Wells, Editor. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lupton, Julia Reinhard. 1997. Othello Circumcised: Shakespeare and the Pauline Discourse of Nations. *Representations*, 57(Winter), 73-89.
- Matar, Nabil. 2000. *Turks, Moors and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Page-Gould, Elizabeth; Mendes Wendy. B. & Major, Brenda. 2010. Intergroup Contact Facilitates Physiological Recovery Following Stressful Intergroup Interactions. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 46(5), 854-858.
- Reicher, S. D.; Spears, R. & Haslam, S.A. 2011. The Social Identity Approach in Social Psychology, In M. Weltherell & C.T. Mohanty (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Identities*. London: Sage.
- Stephan, Walter G., & Stephan, Cookie. W. 2000. An Integrated Threat Theory of Prejudice. In S. Oskamp (Ed.), *The Claremont Symposium on Applied Social Psychology: Reducing Prejudice and Discrimination* (pp. 23-45). Mahwah, NJ, US: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Stephan, Walter G., & Stephan, Cookie W. 1996. Predicting Prejudice. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 20 (3-4, Summer-Autumn), 409-426.
- Sniderman, Paul M. & Hagendoorn, Louk. 2007. *When Ways of Life Collide: Multiculturalism and Its Discontents in the Netherlands*. [E-book] New Jersey: Princeton University Press Princeton.
- Shakespeare, William. 1989. *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*. New York: Barnes & Noble.
- Suratgar, Lutf A. 1994. *History of English Literature (from the Sixteenth Century to the Eighteenth Century)*. Tehran: University of Tehran Press.
- Shapiro, James. 1996. Introduction. In: *Shakespeare and the Jews*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Stewart, Patrick. 1973. *Shakespeare and His Theatre (An Eyewitness book)*. Wayland Michigan.
- Tajfel, Henry. 1974. Social Identity and Intergroup Behaviour. *Social Science Information Subscriber Help & Services*, 13(2), 66.
- Tausch, N., et al. 2007. Individual-level and Group-level Mediators of Contact Effects in Northern Ireland: The Moderating Role of Social Identification. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 46(3), 541-556.
- Verkuyten, Maykel. 1997. The Structure of Ethnic Attitudes: The Effects of Target Group, Region, Gender, and National Identity. *Genetic, Social, and General Psychology*, 123(3), 261-284.
- Velasco González, Karina; Verkuyten, Maykel; Weesie, Jeroen & Poppe, Edwinet. 2008. Prejudice towards Muslims in the Netherlands: Testing Integrated Threat Theory. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 47 (4), 667-685.
- Watt, Home A.; Holzknecht, Karl J. & Ross, Raymond. 1969. *Outlines of Shakespeare's Plays: Synopses, Background Material, Genealogical Charts*. New York: Barnes & Noble.