

# Race and Religion: Politics, Stereotypes and Hypocrisy

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## ABSTRACT

Race, though attributed to colour in modern times, was earlier attributed to culture, which directly linked race to religion. This paper deals with race, religion and its politics along with the stereotypes and hypocrisies associated with it. The paper alludes to England's view of race and religion, where England believed that their race was superior because of their religious beliefs and took the task of the civilizing mission, through religion civilizing other nations. The paper also refers to Turks as growing in world power after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, after which the Turks became a terrible threat to Christian Europe, which is represented in the play through topical allusion. Also, it deals with the position of Jews in this power struggle. It also, depicts the irony, where Christianity and Judaism have the same source and also, it deals with demonization of Judaism that gave rise to certain stereotypes about Jews. The paper also turns one's attention towards the hypocrisy of peoples' religious beliefs, and also how this hypocrisy becomes a uniting factor or a common ground in their fight for dominion.

Notions of race cannot be discussed or defined without the help of religion and where there is religion there is politics. Religion empowered European nations to introduce their values and beliefs in foreign country. This resulted in England using religion as a tool to establish their colonies in different countries because they believed that religion was the only means to civilize people. As a result, the beginning of colonialism in 1607, helped England to expand their trade, values and culture beyond the European borders and thus they had trading alliances with Russia, India and Turkey.

Now since, the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Turks were turning into a world power and posed a terrible threat to Christian Europe. If we consider the play, 'Jew of Malta' the play, that uses topical allusion, then we can say that Spain represents the Christian Europe and the Turks represent the Ottoman Empire because in the play we see that Malta holds allegiance to

both. It has religious allegiance to Spain but Political allegiance to the Turks. The play, portrays that Malta has to pay the taxes to the Turks which represents the growing world power. Moreover, we see Del Bosco, who represents Spain offering help to Ferneze in order to pay the taxes due to the Turks. This scene portrays the insecurity of Spain towards the Turks which in turn represents the fact that Turks posed as a terrible threat to the Christian Europe. Moreover, the Turks carried out a siege against Malta but it was more of a failed siege which resulted in Christians celebrating this failed siege as it showed the dominance of Christianity over Islam.

Now compared to Turks, the Jews did not pose any threat to Europe because they lacked the political power to prepare for an invasion. Moreover, both Judaism and Islam were demonized by the European society, which gave rise to a number of stereotypes that can be seen in the English drama. The best example is, Marlowe's 'Jew of Malta.' If we take a look at history, we can see that Jew's were expelled from England in 1290 and were not officially allowed back in England until 1656. The law passed by King Edward I, to expel Jews, made lot of them to convert to Christianity in order to avoid the expulsion. But many of them practiced their religion in secret which gave rise to suspicions. Jews lived among the Europeans and hence no one could distinguish them from the others in terms of behavior. This caused anxieties within the nation and resulted in the idea of 'feigned Jews', who behaved as Christians with their fellow Christians and as Jews with other Jews. Now, this gave rise to the notion of race and religion during the early modern period. The example for this is Abigail, who when she converts herself into a Christian seeks revenge for her father, she does not really become a Christian. She just does it for the sake of helping her father. Similarly, during the time of Edward I, Jews just converted themselves into Christians to avoid expulsion.

In modern times race is associated with physical appearances. But in medieval times, race was associated with culture. Here, peoples' faith was superior to other characteristics and they believed in a common inheritance which turned race into a religious sense. For example, in the Jew of Malta, we see Ferneze mentioning that it was because of the inherent sin of Jews that Barabas lost his wealth. Whereas in the beginning of the play we see Barabas associating the wealth he has gained to the promise given by God to Abraham.

When worldwide explorations were undertaken, new cultures were discovered which brought a shift in the notions of race. It is believed that the encounter with so many unfamiliar people started shifting the definitions of race away from the paradigm of culture to colour. When race was linked to religion, it brought in the notion that all people who were not white were non-Christians. Moreover, a historical event that took place during the Inquisition at Seville in 1480 introduced a new idea that stated that religious faith was manifested in purity of blood. According to the blood laws, once the Jewish blood was mixed with Christian blood, it will consist non-Christian characteristics that will continue throughout many generations. This manifestation in the purity of blood could be one of the reasons why Abigail's and Mathias' relationship was not accepted.

The irony of this manifestation is that, that both Christians and Jews share the same views. Judaism is a religion that is based on the Old Testament. This part of the Bible consists of laws that deal with circumcision that again is related to the purification ritual. The Old Testament contains laws which do not allow inter-religious marriages because it would make them impure in the sight of God. Moreover, in the Bible, God asks us to set ourselves apart from the world, which is taken in the literal sense by the Jews. When God asks people to set themselves apart from

others, he means it in the spiritual sense not in the physical sense. But we see that Jews considered themselves as strangers, not associating themselves with others. This can also be seen in the play 'Jew of Malta', where Barabas considers himself as a stranger and asks Ferneze the reason for him( Barabas) to pay the taxes that are due to the Turks with his wealth. Moreover, in the play we also see that Barabas does not show any loyalty towards anyone because he betrays both the Turks as well as Ferneze. Thus proving that he considered himself a stranger in the land.

As mentioned earlier, the demonization of Judaism gave rise to certain stereotypes. Jews as a race were associated to cruelty such as mass poisoning, treachery, usury etc and were considered to be in opposition with Christianity. In 'Jew of Malta', Barabas is the representation of the stereotyped Jew in England. The play highlights the crimes committed by him in order to seek his revenge. For example, he kills his own daughter, just because she went against him by converting to Christianity. Marlowe in his plays also depicts the cruelty of Barabas. For example, in order to seek revenge for his daughter, he kills all the nuns in the nunnery. Thus, playing a major role in the mass poisoning of the nuns. Moreover, in Act II(iii), there is the dialogue by Barabas where he admits of committing crimes of mass poisoning, killing people, feigning friendship and deceiving people and also tormenting people with high interests. Marlowe's depiction of this dialogue is proof of the negative conception people in Europe had regarding Jews.

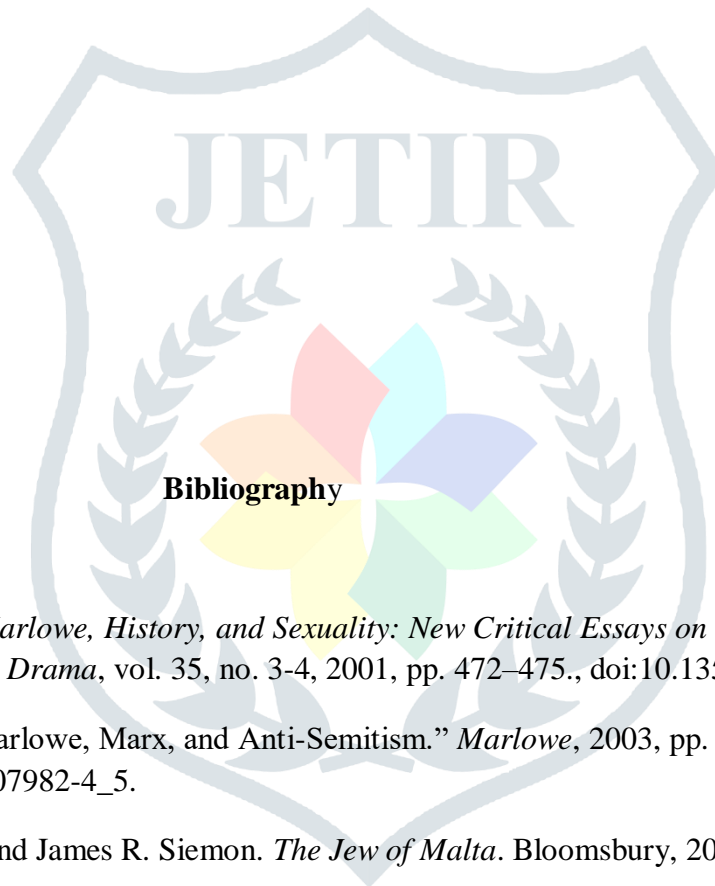
When it comes to religion in the play, Marlowe brings out the religious hypocrisy that is present in all the religions, not just Christianity. All Christians, Jews and Turks use religion either to justify their acts or to hide their evil deeds. In the play, Ferneze and the two Friars represent Christianity, Barabas represents Judaism and the Turks represent Islam. First we look

into the hypocrisy of the Christian characters. Ferneze in the play uses Christianity in order to justify his deeds as well as to hide his actions. For example, when Ferneze questions him regarding the confiscation of his wealth, Barabas replies to him by saying that it is because of the inherent sin of the Jewish community that he is being punished. In the last act, he calls Barabas 'accursed Jew' because of the treason, the treachery of Barabas but fails to realize that he also committed treachery against Barabas, in order to seize his wealth to pay the taxes. Also when Ferneze terms Jews as infidels, again he doesn't recognize that he is also one because he was carrying out trade with the Turks in Malta, which he was not supposed to do. Then we have the Friars: Jacomo and Bernandine. When Abigail was about to die, she confesses her sins and reveals her father's deeds in hope that the friar will not reveal it to anyone. But Bernandine reveals it to Jacomo, which shows his religious hypocrisy. And when they go to Barabas' house to accuse him, Barabas promises to convert to Christianity and give his wealth to the congregation he will belong to. Here also they show their religious hypocrisy by fighting over to which congregation the money will belong to.

Then we have Barabas who also portrays religious hypocrisy. According to Judaism converting to Christianity is equal to damnation in hell. This was the reason for which Barabas killed Abigail. But Barabas shows his religious hypocrisy when he asks her to become a nun in order to get the gold that he has hidden inside his house because his house was turned into a nunnery when he lost his wealth. He also uses religion for his personal agendas. For example, when the friars talk about exposing him, he is willing to convert himself to Christianity and after killing the friars, uses religion as an excuse to escape both conversion and the punishment. Last we have Ithamore, who also portrays religious hypocrisy as he also partakes in all the crimes committed by Barabas and when he along with Barabas had murdered the friars, he says that his

religion does not teach him to murder someone. But all this while he had accompanied Barabas in fulfilling his revenge by murdering many people.

Hence, race is defined within the confines of religion because it is one's religious ideologies that help to create one's perspective about a community. Also, dominion over a race is acquired through the dominion over other religions.



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