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From "the Moor" to Muslim Threat: *Othello* and the Discursive Construction of Islamophobia in Thailand

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Abstract

This article examines the discursive construction of Muslim threat in contemporary Thailand, using William Shakespeare's *Othello* as a comparative literary archive. It argues that anti-Muslim sentiment in Thailand persists through a recurring threat-grammar that renders Muslims legible as strangers, infiltrators, and internal enemies before any empirical proof is required. The article first identifies this grammar in *Othello* through close reading of hostile naming, civic alarm, insinuation, pseudo-proof, and terminal self-othering. It then traces comparable operations in the Thai ideological field through Jesada Buaban's analysis of Muslim strangerhood and Buddhist nationalist discourse, and in a contemporary digital archive documented by Cofact Thailand. Informed by Teun A. van Dijk's sociocognitive account of mental models and manipulation, the analysis shows how Thai election rhetoric and TikTok content manufacture Muslim threat through repetition, decontextualisation, and pseudo-factual laundering. The article concludes that *Othello* illuminates the hegemonic structure of this discourse, while the Thai archive reveals its contemporary operation as a low-intensity, digitally accelerated form of social permission. This study advances Shakespearean studies and Thai sociopolitical discourse by reframing *Othello* as an archive for theorizing Muslim threat-making in Thailand's Buddhist-nationalist digital spheres. It shows how this threat comes to feel like common sense in Asia, revealing the democratic and social costs of discursive manufacture.

Keywords: Islamophobia, Thailand, discursive construction, *Othello*, Cofact Thailand, Muslim strangerhood, securitisation, threat-grammar

1. INTRODUCTION

In March 2023, as Thailand entered an election cycle, a wave of social media posts urged voters to reject certain political parties because they were "Islam-leaning" or "favouring Islam" (*fak fai Itsalam*). One post questioned, "What religion do they *really* follow?" (*nap thue satsana arai kan nae*), implying that Muslim association was itself an index of civic illegitimacy [1]. By May 2025, the ecosystem had become more elaborate. A Cofact Thailand investigation documented thirty active TikTok accounts circulating over 250 videos dedicated to a single, insistent message: that Islam was systematically encroaching upon the Thai nation. The videos featured maps of mosque locations framed as evidence that "Muslims have already seized Thailand" (*Muslim hup prathet Thai laeo*) and fabricated claims about Islamic textbooks being inserted into every school by ministerial regulation. One widely shared slogan warned that "Muslims intend to use Thailand as the centre of Islam" (*Muslim tang jai cha chai prathet Thai pen sun klang khong Itsalam*) [2].

These are not isolated eruptions of online rumour. They belong to a wider and more durable public grammar through which Muslim presence in Thailand is repeatedly translated into a problem of national security, cultural integrity, and moral order. Jesada Buaban has traced the longer ideological foundations of this threat-grammar, showing how Muslims in Thailand are constructed as "strangers" (*khaek*) through nationalist historiography, how the southern conflict is generalised through the insidious formula "not all Muslims are bandits, but all bandits are Muslims," and how Buddhist organisations mobilise the spectre of Islam as a "new ghost" (*phi mai*) to campaign for Buddhist primacy and state recognition [3]. In this discursive field, Muslims need not "do" anything first; they are made dangerous by the way they are spoken into public recognisability.

It is precisely this mechanism, namely the manufacture of threat through discourse prior to evidence, that gives William Shakespeare's *Othello* a startling comparative utility for the Thai context. Rather than positing early modern Venice as a predictive mirror for contemporary Thailand, the inquiry locates a shared discursive infrastructure within these disparate contexts. Shakespeare's *Othello* (Folger edition) functions here as a concentrated archive of the linguistic mechanisms used to transform the Muslim-coded figure into a civic emergency, a sexual menace, and an internal enemy. When this literary repository is read alongside Thai materials, specifically Buaban's ideological critique of Islamophobia and Cofact Thailand's fact-checking reports (2023–2025), a durable "threat-grammar" emerges, operating across radically different historical moments and media ecologies.

Within this comparative framework, "Muslimness" ceases to be viewed as a stable identity and is revealed as a manufactured condition of danger. This condition is meticulously produced through naming, insinuation, and the conversion of repetition into cultural plausibility. By attending to lexical choice, metaphor, and narrative framing, the analysis moves beyond a mere catalogue of prejudice. Instead, it isolates the specific linguistic and cognitive routines that enable the rhetorical conversion of suspicion into apparent evidence, rendering the manufacture of threat as something that feels inherently self-evident.

This study adopts Teun A. van Dijk's sociocognitive approach because Islamophobic "threat-grammar" operates not only at the level of discourse but also at the level of cognition, where repeated representations shape the mental models through which danger is inferred and normalized. As van Dijk argues, social power lies in the capacity to "control the acts and minds" of others [4], and discourse can influence how recipients construct knowledge, attitudes, and ideologies [4]. This makes his model especially effective for tracing how Muslim threat becomes thinkable and self-evident in everyday interpretation.

2. THE GRAMMAR OF THREAT IN *OTHELLO*

Shakespeare's *Othello* has long been read through the lens of race, religion, and early modern English anxiety about the Ottoman Empire. Critics have established that the figure of the "Moor" compresses Blackness, Muslim alterity, and geopolitical menace into a single, volatile signifier [5, 6]. Less attention has been paid, however, to the specific discursive *operations* through which the play makes Othello dangerous. For the purposes of this article, three operations are central: hostile naming and civic alarm; the conversion of insinuation into self-generating pseudo-proof; and terminal self-othering.

Before Othello appears onstage, he is linguistically saturated as a threat. The play opens not with a neutral introduction but with an emergency. Iago and Roderigo do not merely insult the Moor; they stage a public crisis designed to activate Brabantio's paternal and civic authority. The cry, "Awake! what, ho, Brabantio! thieves! thieves! thieves! / Look to your house, your daughter, and your bags!" [7, 1.1.86–87], translates a private marriage into a crime of property violation and sexual theft. The repetition of "thieves" works as an incantation, summoning the apparatus of Venetian order before any facts are established. The triple iteration is not merely emphatic; it is constitutive. Each repetition amplifies the sense of ongoing violation, transforming a singular event into a cascading emergency. By the time Brabantio appears at the window, he has already been positioned as a victim of theft, his paternal authority usurped, and his household violated. The discourse has done its work before the accused has spoken a single line.

The lexical architecture of this alarm repays closer scrutiny. Iago's command to "Rouse him" and "Proclaim him in

the streets" [7, 1.1.75–76] converts a domestic matter into a public spectacle. The verbs escalate: "poison his delight," "plague him with flies," and "throw such chances of vexation on 't / As it may lose some color" [7, 1.1.75, 78, 79–80]. The imagery shifts from awakening to poisoning to plaguing, each verb intensifying the sense of contamination. By the time Iago urges Roderigo to cry out "with like timorous accent and dire yell / As when, by night and negligence, the fire / Is spied in populous cities" [7, 1.1.82–84], the marriage has been rhetorically equated with urban conflagration, a threat to the entire body politic. This is civic alarm manufactured through lexical escalation, not factual report.

The animalising sequence that follows is not merely insult but systematic dehumanisation. "Even now, now, very now, an old black ram / Is tupping your white ewe" [7, 1.1.97–98]. The colour contrast ("black" / "white") racialises the act; the animal metaphor ("ram" / "ewe") removes it from the domain of lawful human union; and the temporal insistence ("now, now, very now") creates a sense of ongoing violation requiring immediate intervention. The triple "now" mirrors the triple "thieves" structurally, embedding the logic of emergency in the very rhythm of the speech. The same logic extends through "Barbary horse" [7, 1.1.125] and the warning that "the devil will make a grandsire of you" [7, 1.1.100]. Each formulation positions Othello's intimacy with a Venetian woman as contamination. Each also frames civic alarm as the only rational response. Crucially, this alarm does not require evidence of wrongdoing. The very fact of the union, once named in this register, becomes self-evident proof of disorder. The parallel to Thai discourse is precise: Muslims are not accused of specific crimes; their public presence, a mosque, a political affiliation, or a demographic statistic, is reframed as encroachment or capture through the same threat-grammar.

The second operation, and the one most vital for this comparative argument, is the conversion of insinuation into self-generating pseudo-proof. Iago's genius is not his hatred but his understanding of mediation. He does not simply accuse Desdemona; he arranges the cognitive conditions under which Othello will generate the accusation himself. The process begins with the gnomic non-statement: "Ha! I like not that" [7, 3.3.37]. The utterance is deliberately empty of content, yet it primes Othello to scan for confirmation. Its power lies precisely in its semantic vacancy: because it asserts nothing, it cannot be refuted. It operates as a cognitive prompt, an invitation to suspicion dressed as mere observation. Othello's immediate follow-up, "What dost thou say?" [7, 3.3.38], demonstrates the mechanism in motion; he has already begun the work of supplying content to Iago's hollow gesture. In van Dijk's terms, the point is not simply that Iago speaks persuasively, but that he helps structure the mental conditions under which Othello experiences suspicion as his own conclusion rather than as externally planted discourse [4].

Iago then deploys a series of commands that shift the burden of proof onto Othello's own cognition. When Othello asks "What dost thou think?" [7, 3.3.119], Iago echoes, "Think, my lord?" [7, 3.3.120]. The imperative "think" is not an invitation to reasoned analysis but a directive to generate suspicion. Othello's response, "thou echo'st me / As if there were some monster in thy thought / Too hideous to be shown" [7, 3.3.121–23], reveals the mechanism in action: he supplies the content that Iago has only gestured toward. The word "monster" is Othello's own, yet he attributes it to Iago's hidden thought. The insinuation has become collaborative; Othello co-produces the very accusation that will destroy him. This is pseudo-proof in its most insidious form: the target does the work of constructing the evidence, and because the conclusion feels self-generated, it resists external correction.

The handkerchief completes this conversion. In its first mention, it is a "napkin" [7, 3.3.330], an object of sentimental value. Within a single scene, Iago has upgraded it to "proofs of holy writ" [7, 3.3.372], and Othello demands "ocular proof" [7, 3.3.412]. The escalation is not factual but discursive. The handkerchief does not *contain* evidence; it is *made into* evidence through the repeated assertion of its significance. The shift in register from the domestic "napkin" to the juridical-sacred "proofs of holy writ" performs the transformation linguistically. What was once a love token becomes a forensic exhibit, and the transformation occurs not through discovery of new facts but through the sheer rhetorical pressure of Iago's insinuation. Othello's soliloquy at the scene's midpoint marks the internalisation of this logic: "Haply, for I am black, / And have not those soft parts of conversation / That chamberers have" [7, 3.3.304–06]. The word "haply" ("perhaps") registers uncertainty; Othello is testing the slur against his own self-understanding rather than asserting it as settled truth. Yet the very fact that he can articulate the possibility shows how deeply the external frame has entered his cognitive repertoire. The stigma of Act 1 has become available to him as an explanatory language for his own loss. Teun A. van Dijk's sociocognitive theory clarifies this movement: repeated discourse restructures cognition so that suspicion feels like discovery rather than imposition [4]. In the Thai digital archive, we will see the same mechanism at work: doctored images, decontextualised statistics, and fabricated regulations are not presented as accusations but as "discoveries" of a threat that the audience is invited to verify for itself. This is pseudo-proof: the appearance of evidence produced by the very discourse that claims merely to report it.

The third operation is the endpoint of threat discourse. Othello's final speech is a suicide, but it is also an act of discursive self-annihilation. He does not simply die; he executes himself *as* the Muslim enemy. The speech pivots on a remembered scene: "in Aleppo once, / Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk / Beat a Venetian and traduced the state, / I took by th' throat the circumcised dog / And smote him thus" [7, 5.2.413–17]. By naming himself the "turban'd Turk" and "circumcised dog," Othello completes the logic of the play's opening slurs. He has internalised the category of the

Muslim enemy so completely that he enforces its erasure upon his own body. The Venetian state, which had conditionally accepted his military service, is symbolically restored through his self-execution. The endpoint of threat discourse is not merely exclusion; it is the point at which the targeted subject becomes the agent of the logic of danger. In the Thai context, this does not manifest as individual tragedy but as a form of public permission, the point at which surveillance, exclusion, and suspicion become speakable as prudence, patriotism, or protection of the Buddhist nation.

It is necessary to state the comparison's limits clearly. *Othello* stages an elite civic panic concentrated in a single intimate crisis; its medium is poetic drama performed for a metropolitan audience. The Thai archive, by contrast, documents a mass-mediated, digitally circulated, low-intensity repetition of threat claims across social media platforms. Venice's threat-grammar operates through metaphor, soliloquy, and tragic denouement; Thailand's operates through clips, captions, memes, and algorithmic amplification. The point is not transhistorical sameness, but comparable *operations of Muslim legibility* under different media conditions. The value of the comparison lies in recognising that the discursive manufacture of Muslim threat, making a community legible as a problem before any act of wrongdoing occurs, is not a singular modern pathology but a durable and adaptable grammar. With this analytical vocabulary in hand, we can now turn to the Thai field.

3. THE THAI IDEOLOGICAL FIELD: STRANGERS, BANDITS, AND THE "NEW GHOST"

Jesada Buaban's article "Islamophobia as Represented by Thai Buddhist Organizations" establishes the longer ideological terrain upon which contemporary digital discourse operates. Buaban argues that Thai nationalist historiography has systematically rendered Muslims as *khaek*, a term whose semantic residue carries connotations of foreignness, transience, and incomplete belonging. This strangerhood is particularly acute for Malay-Muslim communities with centuries of habitation in the southern border provinces, yet it extends to Muslims throughout the country [3]. The term *khaek* does not merely describe; it positions. It places Muslims outside the imagined community of the Thai nation even as they reside within its borders. This is the foundational condition of public illegibility: Muslims are permanently marked as not-quite-belonging, and their presence always requires explanation or justification.

Buaban traces the historical depth of this positioning. In ancient Siam, Muslims were already designated *khaek*, a term that simultaneously signified "visitor" and "stranger," distinguishing them from Europeans (*farang*) and Chinese (*chin*) while denying them the full belonging accorded to ethnic Thai [3]. This lexical inheritance has proven remarkably durable. Even Malay-Muslims whose ancestors have inhabited the southern peninsula for centuries are discursively positioned as late arrivals, their presence always open to questions of origins and loyalties. Buaban further notes that Thai elites historically referred to Islam as a "fake religion" because of its theistic orientation, which was perceived as incompatible with non-theistic Buddhism [3]. Thus, the ground was prepared long in advance: Muslims were not only strangers but adherents of a suspect doctrine, doubly marked for suspicion.

This strangerhood is compounded by the discursive handling of the southern conflict. Buaban documents the insidious formula "not all Muslims are bandits, but all bandits are Muslims." The phrase functions as a devastatingly efficient ideological tool: it acknowledges the existence of peaceful Muslims while simultaneously ensuring that the category "Muslim" remains permanently associated with violence and separatism [3]. No amount of peaceful conduct can dislodge the association, because the logic is structured to survive counter-examples. A peaceful Muslim becomes the exception that proves the rule, while any Muslim involved in violence confirms the rule absolutely. The formula is self-sealing: it immunises itself against refutation by treating counter-evidence as merely temporary or deceptive. This is the threat-grammar operating at the level of public maxim, a piece of folk wisdom that circulates as common sense precisely because its logic is circular. This explains why the "internal enemy" trope holds particular force in the Thai context. Unlike in *Othello*, where the Muslim-coded figure threatens through intimacy, racial difference, and Venetian civic anxiety, Thai Islamophobic discourse draws on the unresolved memory of the southern border conflict. This transforms a regional security issue into national suspicion of Muslim belonging, converting the Malay-Muslim insurgent into a symbol of the potentially disloyal Muslim citizen. Buaban's formula, "not all Muslims are bandits, but all bandits are Muslims" [3], illustrates how the conflict bridges local violence to nationalized Islamophobia, framing Muslim visibility elsewhere as latent separatism, infiltration, or demographic takeover.

Buaban's most significant contribution, however, is his documentation of how Buddhist organisations have mobilised this discursive field for political ends. Islam is cast as a "new ghost" (*phi mai*) haunting the Thai nation, a destroyer of identity, and a force by which Thailand might be "swallowed by Islam" (*thuk Itsalam kleun*) [3]. Campaigns for constitutional recognition of Buddhism as the national religion routinely invoke the spectre of Islamic encroachment, demographic takeover, and the erosion of Thai Buddhist values. This is not fringe rhetoric; it is the language of mainstream organisations seeking to consolidate political capital through the securitisation of religious difference. The "new ghost" metaphor is particularly instructive. It draws on a deeply embedded cultural vocabulary of supernatural threat, the *phi* or ghost that haunts, possesses, and destroys, while updating it for contemporary political purposes. The ghost is both immaterial, because it is discursive, and urgently dangerous, because it is perceived as requiring ritual or political exorcism.

It cannot be reasoned with; it can only be expelled. This metaphorical frame prepares the affective ground for the digital panic that would follow: if Islam is a ghost, then every mosque is a haunting, and every Muslim presence a spectral encroachment.

Crucially, Buaban's analysis reveals how this ideological field prepares the ground for the digital materials we will examine. The "strangerhood" established in nationalist historiography makes the online claim of Muslim encroachment feel intuitively plausible. The "bandit" formula primes audiences to accept that Muslim political participation is a form of covert infiltration. The "new ghost" metaphor provides an affective frame, a sense of haunted national vulnerability, that digital content can activate with minimal discursive effort. The threat-grammar is already culturally installed; social media content needs only to trigger it. This is why the Cofact materials, to which we now turn, can achieve such traction with such flimsy evidentiary foundations. They do not need to prove their claims; they need only to invoke a pre-existing structure of public legibility in which Muslim presence is already coded as a problem.

4. TIKTOK, COFACT, AND THE MANUFACTURE OF MUSLIM THREAT

The Cofact Thailand reports by Kulthida Samaphutthi and Zhang Taehun provide a live archive of discursive threat-manufacture in the Thai digital public sphere. The materials they document fall into four thematic clusters, each of which echoes the operations identified in *Othello* and each of which requires analysis beyond mere summary.

A persistent narrative holds that mosque construction and state-supported prayer spaces are evidence of Islamic seizure. One claim fact-checked by Cofact in May 2025 asserted that government funding for mosques proved that "Muslims have already seized the government" (*Muslim hup ratthaban pai laeo*) [2]. Maps showing the distribution of mosques across Thailand were shared without context, accompanied by warnings that the nation was nearing "Islamic-state status." One TikTok video overlaid a map of Thailand marked with mosque locations with the caption "nearing Islamic state status at every moment" [2].

The discursive operation here is twofold. First, it converts ordinary demographic or infrastructural facts, namely the existence of places of worship for a minority population, into evidence of a coordinated plot. Second, it frames state accommodation of religious diversity as capitulation to an enemy. The map, a genre associated with objectivity and territorial control, is repurposed as an instrument of civic alarm. This is the threat-grammar of naming and alarm transposed to cartographic form: the mere existence of Muslim spaces is reframed as an emergency requiring public response. The mechanism mirrors Iago's nocturnal cry in Venice: what is simply present is made to appear as an imminent violation. A related claim documented by Cofact alleged that "there are over 100 mosques throughout Chiang Mai," a figure wildly inflated from the registered total of fourteen [8]. The inflation itself is the point: the number is chosen not for accuracy but for its capacity to alarm.

The 2023 election materials documented by Samaphutthi are exemplary of a second operation. The phrase "Islam-leaning party" (*phak fak fai Itsalam*) was deployed to delegitimise political opponents. The question "What religion do they *really* follow?" (*nap thue satsana arai kan nae*) transforms Muslim political participation into a hidden agenda [1]. During a parliamentary session on 16 February 2023, an MP explicitly asked of the then-Prime Minister the same question and urged Buddhists to use their votes to remove him [1]. Suspicion is not presented as accusation but as prudent questioning. The rhetorical form, a question rather than an assertion, provides deniability while achieving the same cognitive effect as an explicit charge. The audience is invited to supply the answer that the question has already implied. This mirrors Iago's "I like not that" [7, 3.3.37] in its deniability and its cognitive productivity. In both cases, the speaker positions himself as merely observing, while the listener does the work of constructing the threat. Pseudo-proof is generated by the audience's own inferential labour, making the conclusion feel self-discovered rather than externally imposed.

Cofact debunked a range of lurid falsehoods circulating in the Thai digital sphere, including claims that Islamic law permits daughters to marry their fathers [2]; that Islamic textbooks teach contempt for non-Muslim benefactors; and that ministerial regulations had mandated Islamic studies in all Thai schools. One widely circulated falsehood alleged that "Islamic textbooks state that one must not *wai* benefactors because it violates religious principles" [8]. The claim is particularly potent because it targets a core Thai cultural practice, the *wai* gesture of respect, and positions Islam as fundamentally hostile to Thai social norms. These are not random fabrications; they are targeted constructions designed to render Islam morally unintelligible and civically dangerous. Each claim positions the Muslim as a figure whose values are fundamentally incompatible with Thai social order. The fabricated content about Islamic textbooks is instructive in another sense: it takes a domain associated with authority and transmission, namely education, and inserts a false premise, namely that Muslims are taught to despise non-Muslims. The claim then circulates as if it were documentary evidence rather than invention. Once embedded in the digital ecosystem, the fabrication becomes a durable reference point for future threat-claims. Even after fact-checking, the residue of the claim remains available for reactivation. This is pseudo-proof operating at scale: the fabrication does not need to be true to function as "evidence" in subsequent iterations of the threat-grammar.

A recurring claim in the Thai digital sphere is that "Islam is forbidden in Japan" (*prathet Yipun ham Itsalam*). The

claim is false. It does not provide information about Japanese law. Instead, it launders a local prejudice through the borrowed authority of an external, non-Muslim nation imagined as more developed or rational. The implication is that Japan has already reached a conclusion that Thailand has yet to recognise, and that Thailand's failure to follow suit is a mark of weakness or naivety [9]. One TikTok video in this vein claimed that Japan grants no citizenship to Muslims, prohibits Arabic instruction, and bans the importation of the Qur'an, all assertions for which no evidence exists and which official Japanese data on Muslim population growth and mosque construction directly contradict [9]. This is a form of pseudo-proof that bypasses factual verification entirely, appealing instead to a desired common sense. It is structurally similar to the way Iago invokes the authority of "proof" without ever supplying it. The mere invocation of an external, supposedly objective standard is sufficient to make the local prejudice feel globally validated. Epistemic laundering is a particularly insidious operation because it borrows the prestige of a foreign "fact" to bypass local scrutiny.

The platform form of TikTok deserves attention in its own right. Unlike the extended arguments of parliamentary debate or the narrative structure of news reporting, TikTok content operates through brevity, repetition, and affective compression. A map overlaid with alarmist text, a decontextualised image of a mosque, or a five-second clip of a politician raising his hands in a gesture mislabelled as a "conversion ritual" does not argue; it triggers. The visual and textual elements are designed for rapid cognitive uptake, bypassing deliberative processing. The same claims circulate across multiple accounts with minor variations, creating an illusion of independent corroboration. When thirty accounts repeat the same narrative of mosque encroachment, the repetition itself becomes a form of pseudo-proof: "so many people are saying it, there must be something there." The algorithmic architecture of TikTok favours engagement-driving content, and threat content, especially content that activates moral outrage or tribal identification, generates high engagement. Thus, the platform's design amplifies the very content most likely to deepen the threat-grammar.

Across all four clusters, the mechanism is consistent. Falsehood becomes credible through accumulation; repetition substitutes for evidence; and national concern is staged through the ordinary formats of digital culture. Crucially, the fact-checking work of Cofact Thailand itself constitutes a form of counter-discourse, marking specific claims as unsupported, manipulated, or false. As the Cofact reports explicitly warn, these false or distorted contents are dangerous precisely because they "deepen misunderstanding and make people unable to distinguish what is 'true' and 'not true' about Islam and Muslims" [9]. Yet the volume and velocity of the threat content often overwhelm rebuttal. A single fact-check may reach only a fraction of the audience exposed to the original fabrication. The algorithmic architecture of platforms such as TikTok favours engagement-driving content over corrective information. Moreover, fact-checks require cognitive effort to process; threat claims require only recognition of a pre-existing script. The asymmetry is structural: it is easier to activate a threat-grammar than to dismantle it, easier to repeat a fabrication than to correct it, and easier to make a community legible as dangerous than to restore it to ordinary visibility. This structural asymmetry is central to understanding why the threat-grammar remains so durable.

5. CONCLUSION: THE POLITICS OF LEGIBILITY

Reading *Othello* alongside the Thai archive clarifies something essential about the structure of anti-Muslim discourse in an Asian present. It is not reducible to isolated prejudice, nor to fringe misinformation, nor to the specific grievances of the southern border provinces. It is a hegemonic structure of legibility. Before any act of violence or exclusion occurs, discourse narrows a community into a skewed representation, namely stranger, bandit, encroacher, or ghost, and then mistakes that selective portrayal for public truth. *Othello* matters for this analysis not because it offers a universal template, but because it illuminates the durability of this threat-grammar across centuries and media. The play shows us, in concentrated literary form, how threat-grammar works: how naming creates the condition for civic alarm, how insinuation manufactures its own pseudo-proof, and how the targeted subject can be made to enforce the logic of his own erasure.

In Thailand today, the manufacture of Muslim threat is a low-intensity, digitally accelerated operation. It runs on TikTok as surely as it once ran on the early modern stage. The contribution of this article has been to name the specific discursive operations, including hostile naming, civic alarm, pseudo-proof, moral panic, and epistemic laundering, and to demonstrate their work in a contemporary Asian archive. Recognizing this grammar is the first step toward interrupting it, with practical implications for Thai educational policy and social cohesion initiatives. In education, the findings call for stronger media-literacy curricula that teach students how religious misinformation arises through repetition, decontextualised images, pseudo-statistics, and emotionally charged framing. Such curricula should frame Islamophobia not as mere personal prejudice, but as a discursive process that converts ordinary signs of Muslim life into national dangers. Civic education, teacher training, and textbook review should therefore address Thailand's religious diversity, Malay-Muslim historical belonging, and the risks of equating Muslim identity with separatism or cultural threat. The analysis points to the need for interreligious initiatives that move beyond ceremonial harmony to address the specific narratives through which suspicion is normalised. Fact-checking, public dialogue, and community-based education must work together, since correcting isolated falsehoods is insufficient when the deeper grammar of threat remains intact.

This analysis also has clear limits, which should be stated explicitly. The Cofact reports document the form and

circulation of false or distorted claims, but they do not by themselves establish the full reach, uptake, or measurable political impact of those claims. The article focuses on digital discourse rather than the broader Thai media ecology, and it therefore does not address television, print news, or everyday spoken circulation in any sustained way. Nor does it offer fieldwork or interviews with Thai Muslims about the lived experience of such discourse, or a full account of Muslim counter-discourses beyond the corrective work registered in the fact-checking archive itself. These limitations define the scope of the present argument without weakening the identification of a threat-grammar. Future research could extend this study in four directions: first, by investigating how Thai users interpret, accept, resist, or ignore Islamophobic content on platforms such as TikTok and Facebook; second, by broadening the media corpus to include television, print journalism, parliamentary debates, school materials, and everyday spoken discourse; third, through comparative work examining whether similar threat-grammars operate in other Buddhist-majority or Muslim-minority contexts in Southeast Asia, such as Myanmar, Sri Lanka, or Cambodia; and finally, by testing whether the comparative method used here applies beyond *Othello*, especially to plays where strangerhood, conversion, empire, and civic suspicion shape the construction of racial or religious difference.

The stakes of this recognition are not merely academic. When suspicion becomes common sense, the social cost is borne by Muslim communities who must navigate a public sphere in which their very presence is framed as a problem. The threat-grammar documented here produces a specific kind of public culture: one in which Muslim legibility is pre-scripted before any action. A mosque is not first a place of worship; it is first an encroachment. A Muslim politician is not first a candidate; they are first a question about "real" religion. A Muslim student's request for accommodation is not first a matter of educational access; it is first a sign of creeping Islamisation. This pre-scripting forecloses ordinary civic encounter. It erodes the conditions for democratic coexistence, which depend on the capacity to encounter others without a predetermined narrative of threat. Democratic coexistence requires that communities be legible as neighbours, colleagues, and fellow citizens, not only as problems to be managed or dangers to be surveilled. The threat-grammar systematically degrades that capacity.

Literary comparison matters for this diagnosis not as analogy alone, but as structural analysis. *Othello* allows us to see the grammar in its concentrated form, stripped of the noise of contemporary media. It reveals that the operations are not new, not unique to any one cultural context, and not dependent on any particular technology. They are durable precisely because they are adaptable. Venice's stage and Thailand's TikTok are different media, but the grammar persists. To recognise that persistence is to refuse the claim that each new wave of anti-Muslim discourse is merely a response to contemporary events. It is, rather, the activation of a long-available script. Critical exposure does not neutralise the script, but it makes it harder to mistake the script for reality. That exposure is the first condition of any meaningful response, and the necessary ground for a public culture in which Muslim legibility is not predetermined by the grammar of threat.

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