



العرق والآخريّة في مسرحية عطيل لشكسبير: قراءة ما بعد استعمارية
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المديرية العامة للتربية في النجف الأشرف

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المخلص

تقدم هذه الدراسة تفسيراً معمقاً لما بعد الاستعمار لمسرحية عطيل لويليام شكسبير، إذ تستكشف المسرحية موضوعات العرق والهوية والسلطة والاختلاف. ويستند التحليل إلى دراسة نوعية للنص، مع التركيز على مفاهيم ما بعد الاستعمار الرئيسية، لتحليل تصوير عطيل كغريب، عرقياً وثقافياً، عن المجتمع الفينيسي. ومن خلال تحليل مشاهد مختارة، تشمل مقدمة الصراع، وخطابه في مجلس الشيوخ، ومشاهد التلاعب، والذروة المأساوية، تُبرز الدراسة أهمية اللغة العنصرية، والإقصاء الاجتماعي، وتغير مفهوم الذات في تحديد البنية الدرامية للمسرحية.

وتُظهر النتائج أن مأساة عطيل لا يمكن اعتبارها مجرد فشل فردي ناتج عن الغيرة، بل إن هلاكه مرتبط ارتباطاً وثيقاً بهشاشة قبوله الاجتماعي، وبأن اختلافه كان واضحاً باستمرار. تُجادل هذه الورقة البحثية بأن التكرار المستمر للصور النمطية العنصرية، والاندماج المشروط لشخصية عطيل في البنية السياسية الفينيسية، والترسيخ التدريجي للصور النمطية السلبية، كلها عوامل ساهمت في انهياره النفسي. علاوة على ذلك، تُشير المسرحية إلى قلق المجتمع الأوروبي في أوائل العصر الحديث بشأن الزواج المختلط والرجولة والحوازر الثقافية.

وبوضع مسرحية عطيل في سياق ما بعد الاستعمار، تُبين هذه الدراسة كيف استبقت مسرحية شكسبير التوجهات الاستعمارية اللاحقة التي تُقدّر فيها الهوية العرقية وتُفوّض في الوقت نفسه. وأخيراً، يُثبت التحليل أن العرق أحد القوى البنيوية الرئيسية في المسرحية، والذي يُشكّل الهوية وعلاقات القوة والنتيجة المأساوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: السلطة، الهوية العرقية، ما بعد الاستعمار، العرق، الهوية.

Race and Otherness in Shakespeare's *Othello*: A Postcolonial Reading

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Abstract

The study provides a thorough postcolonial interpretation of *Othello* by William Shakespeare, as the Shakespearean play explores the theme of race, identity, power, and otherness. The analysis is based on qualitative analysis of text with major postcolonial concepts to analyze the construction of *Othello* as an outsider, racially and culturally, to the Venetian society. Through the analysis of chosen scenes including introduction of the conflict, the speech at Senate, the scenes of manipulation and the tragic climax, the study points out the importance of racial language, social exclusion, and the change of self-perception in determining the dramatic structure of the play.

The results show that the tragedy of *Othello* cannot be perceived as a pure case of individual failure because of jealousy. Rather, his demise is tightly related to the fact that



his social acceptance is shaky and his difference is constantly marked. The paper contends that the constant repetition of racialized visuals, conditional integration of *Othello* into Venetian political structure, and progressive internalization of negative stereotypes are some of the factors that lead to his psychological breakdown. Moreover, the play indicates the concern of the early modern European society regarding the interracial marriage and masculinity and the cultural barriers.

Placing *Othello* in a postcolonial context, this study demonstrates how the play by Shakespeare prefigures subsequent colonial trends in which racial Otherness is appreciated and undermined at the same time. Finally, the analysis proves that race is one of the main structural forces of the play, which forms the identity, power relations, and tragic outcome.

Keywords: Power, Otherness, Postcolonialism, Race, Identity.

1. Introduction

Othello by William Shakespeare (1603-1604) continues to be one of the plays that have been extensively discussed in English literature and in particular, the issue of race, identity and power. It is how *Othello* is a respected military leader in Venice and is always branded as different due to his racial and cultural background. Through a postcolonial reading, we can realize how the play has created *Othello* as the Other and how it is a process of forming ideas of race and difference in Europe during the early modern period. The topics of postcolonial theory revolve around the ways in which colonized or marginalized people are represented in literature and how power circulates in the form of language, culture and social systems (Said, 1978).

At the heart of *Othello* is a strong conflict of inclusion and non-inclusion. On the one hand, *Othello* seems to be a full member of the Venetian society. He is a high ranking military man, is trusted by the Duke and he gets married to Desdemona who is a woman belonging to a noble family in Venetian society. These indicators are an indication of success and social mobility. But, on closer examination, such acceptance is weak. *Othello* is not only constantly referred to as a general or as a husband but as a Moor. This name simplifies his multi-ethnic identity to the racial category and maintains his symbolical non-belonging to the Venetian model. Within a postcolonial context, this doublemas, being within and outside, is the typical state of the racialized outsider.

The idea of othering by Edward Said can be used to explain this dynamic effectively. According to Said (1978), the Western discourse tends to embark on defining itself by creating exotic, dangerous, or inferior non-Europeans. Though *Othello* was composed earlier than the peak of the European colonial expansion, the play is obviously involved in the early versions of this thought. *Othello* is loved as a useful man in the army but he is a suspect due to his origin, color and culture. This combination of admiration and fear indicates what the postcolonial critics define as ambivalence toward the racial Other.

This pattern is created right at the beginning of the play. *Othello* even before he comes on stage is characterized by the unfriendly words of Iago and Roderigo. Iago also uses animal metaphors to describe him, the most renowned remark he makes about him being an old black ram. This is not just an insult to



Othello, but the symbolic way of degrading him as a human being. Postcolonial theorists observe that dehumanization is a popular technique of upholding social status quos. Iago appeals to animal instincts by putting Othello in a situation where he is considered an animal and this appeals to cultural anxieties of race difference and sexual danger. Notably, this unfriendly talk shapes the initial perception that the audience has of Othello.

However, Shakespeare confuses this context by providing *Othello* with a strong and noble voice when he makes his ultimate appearance. His address to the Venetian Senate is calm, rational and emotionless. He tells his life story in a restrained fashion and does not go into emotional over the top that his foes are hoping on. This scene is memorable as it provokes the racial stereotypes surrounding him in the short term. As Greenblatt (1980) notes, *Othello* shows the remarkable skill of appropriating the rhetoric style appreciated by the inhabitants of Venetian high society. Thus, he seems to transcend the cultural divide between him and the society in which he works in.

But the play slowly unveils that this crossing has not been completely completed. The acceptance of *Othello* is dependent on how useful he is to the state. Handling a military leader in the time of war, he is appreciated, yet his status in the society is weak. According to Ania Loomba (2002), early modern books tend to permit little movement of racial outsiders and preserve strong cultural boundaries at the same time. This trend is evident in *Othello*. As soon as the domestic life that *Othello* carries out turns unstable, the previous racial suspicions are soon back.

Language is important in terms of sustaining this precarious stand. Iago addresses *Othello* in the play through various occasions and words that emphasize the difference over the similarities. The racial label of Moor even lingers on *Othello* even when other people address him in a respectable manner. This constant branding confirms the notion that he will never become entirely Venetian. Postcolonial theory helps to remember that these naming practices are the instruments of social control. The characters in the play keep the separation between the European self and the racial Other by repeatedly calling *Othello* by other names.

A second dimension of the play that has been crucial is the psychological impact of this social pressure. In the early part of the play, Othello is seen as a confident and in control person. He has faith in Desdemona, admires his status, and is authoritative. However, as the manipulations by Iago continue, Othello starts to suspect his wife as well as himself. His words are more disjointed, emotional, and violent. This change is not only the outcome of jealousy, but it is also an expression of more profound insecurity about belonging. According to Frantz Fanon (1967), the recurrence of racial suspicion can cause internalized self-doubt in the subject of the marginalized. This is the pattern followed closely by Othello.

One of the most eye-opening scenes is when Othello himself associates his insecurity with his race. According to him, Desdemona can turn her back on him since he does not have the social polish of Venetian men. In this case, exterior discourse of otherness is turned into interior belief. In a postcolonial sense, this internalization is the key to the tragedy. The manipulation of Othello by Iago is not only successful due to his cunning nature but also because Othello is already a person in a socially vulnerable status. His surrounding society has silently geared him to his psychological breakdown.

Anxiety of interracial marriage of the time in the play also mirrors that of the early modern Europe. The marriage of Othello and Desdemona is not only interracial but also intercultural and most people are surprised or even suspicious of the union. With Brabantio accusing Othello of having used magic to win



over Desdemona, it is clear that a society that exists in Venetians is finding it extremely hard to believe that people can love each other, thus crossing racial boundaries. Such a response foreshadows subsequent colonial anxieties that there will be miscegenation and cultural contamination. The play reveals much discomfort regarding the viability of social and racial divisions through this conflict.

Simultaneously, Shakespeare does not make Othello look like a mere victim. The character is an agent with dignity and tragic depth. A post-colonial reading should then be careful not to narrow down the play to one ideological message only. Rather, it is the tension of Othello that makes it powerful. The play challenges and replicates the early modern racial thinking. It provides Othello with instances of power and oratory as well as displays how easily he can be returned to the role of the stranger.

It is excruciatingly evident in the last act of the play. By turning the wrongdoing on himself, Othello is trying to reclaim his dignity, directing his acts in the context of right and righteousness. However, his struggle is not enough to reverse the harm done by the previous othering process. His sad demise implies the boundaries of assimilation in a society that is organized in terms of racial hierarchy. As much as a general of great esteem cannot be completely out of the label of difference.

To sum up, using the postcolonial theory, reading *Othello* can shed light on the numerous ways the play addresses the issue of race, identity, and power as presented by Shakespeare. The play shows how language, social organization, and mental pressure combine in an effort to create *Othello* in the racial Other. Meanwhile, the play reveals the fragility of this building by providing *Othello* with the moments of dignity and defiance. This is one of the primary reasons why Othello remains a powerful speaker to the contemporary audiences. The play, in addition to being a mirror of the early modernity of the issues of difference, also provides the glimpse into the later colonial developments that still define the discourses of race and representation to this day (Said, 1978; Loomba, 2002; Fanon, 1967).

1.1. Statement of the Problem

In as much as most people read *Othello* by William Shakespeare as a play of jealousy and manipulation, what they fail to realize is that race and cultural difference take center stage in the play events. Othello is honored as a warrior in Venice, but he is constantly stigmatized as a racially and culturally heterogeneous person. This is where a major critical issue arises, is it majorly individual that Othello is his own downfall or is it heavily shaped by othering constructed around him?

Previous interpretations tended to use race as the excluded factor instead of a motivation to the tragedy. Literary texts can often be involved in the broader cultural processes which, as postcolonial critics like Said (1978) and Loomba (2002) point out, define and marginalise racial Otherness. Nevertheless, it remains necessary to have an articulate analysis that relates these theoretical concepts to the language and form of Othello.

Thus, this paper explores how Shakespeare creates Othello as the racial Other and how the creation leads to his psychological breakdown and tragic downfall.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

This research aims at discussing the theme of race and otherness in *Othello*, as it is portrayed through a postcolonial perspective. The paper will examine the way in which Othello is incorporated and excluded into the Venetian society, the way language terms are used to racialize Othello and how internalized



otherness adds to his downfall. The paper will attempt to demonstrate that the tragedy is not a one-sided event, but strongly linked to social and racial confrontations.

1.3. Research Questions

The following questions guide this study:

1. In what ways is Shakespeare making Othello racially and culturally Other?
2. What is the role of language in the play in strengthening the racial difference?
3. What is the discourse of otherness internalised by Othello?
4. How can Othello be interpreted as the early race of colonial anxiety?

2. Literature Review

It has long been identified among scholars that the questions of race, identity, and difference are deeply worked in William Shakespeare *Othello*. Nonetheless, it has taken a long time before critical concentration on these issues has been developed. In previous interpretations, the play was commonly understood as a domestic tragedy of jealousy and marital discord. *Othello* racial identity in a great number of these readings turned out to be a secondary issue rather than a driving force behind the dramatic movement. As the postcolonial criticism and cultural studies gained popularity, researchers started to be more attentive to the role of race and power in the play. Such a change has allowed *Othello* to be viewed as an individual tragedy as well as one that is more concerned with the creation of otherness.

One of the most important theoretical backgrounds of contemporary conceptualization of racial representation is the Orientalism concept. The western literary tradition has mostly depicted non-European characters as exotic, dangerous or inferior in nature, which add up to the power of the European culture (Said, 1978). This framework is not created with Shakespeare in mind, however, it provides a good prism through which one can interpret the way in which *Othello* fits into the society of the Venice. He is portrayed as a valuable and threatening, admired and distrusted simultaneously in the play many times. This two-fold representation is indicative of a larger cultural trend where the racial Other is needed and feared at the same time.

Postcolonial scholarship has also added to its discussion much insight into the way *Othello* was placed in the context of early modern debates on race and empire. The play is characterized by a high level of cultural anxiety in the interracial marriage and social boundaries that are unstable. Critics have pointed out that the marriage of Desdemona to Othello upsets the social order due to the fact that it is interracial as well as intercultural. The play reflects the fear of racial mixing and cultural frontiers (Loomba, 2002, p. 91). This observation assists in understanding why Brabantio and other people respond with such vehemence to the marriage. This fear is not only an individual one, but something more symbolic, a fear of purity, hierarchy and social control.

This reading is further supported by historical research on early modern England, which reveals that during that era, blackness was a frequent connotation of moral suspicion and disorder in the cultural imagination. The writings and works of that time tended to associate dark skin with danger, oversexuality, and instability of emotions (Hall, 1995). In the language of the animal imagery and racial insults, which he employs to describe Othello, Iago finds his strength in already existing associations. This



context is critical since it demonstrates that the play does not invent racial anxiety out of thin air but it mirrors and enacts on attitudes, which existed in the early modern culture.

The manner in which Othello first assumes power in the Venetian society has also been focused on. His oration before the senate shows outstanding rhetorical reserve and self-control. Now, he seems to be perfectly able to work according to the Venetian political and social standards. This has been interpreted to be a show of effective identity performance where the outsider learns to speak and appreciate the language and values of the dominant culture so as to become accepted (Greenblatt, 1980). This acceptance is however not consistent. As the story unfolds, the situation of Othello starts to deteriorate, and the previous racial suspicions are soon back. This tendency indicates that he was never confident in his belonging but conditional.

Socially more historical scholarship has located the play in the broader context of the early modern world contact. At the end of the sixteenth century and the first years of the seventeenth century, England was extending its diplomatic and commercial contacts with North Africa and the Mediterranean world. The fascination and anxiety at these encounters are common in literary texts of this period. In this context, the figure of the Moor is an object of cultural space, where anxieties of foreignness, religion, and difference are brokered (Singh, 2007). This historical interpretation of *Othello* enables one to understand how much of the focus on origin, travel, and cultural setting therein is brought about by the play.

Renaissance rhetoric and dramatic language studies are yet another source of indication on the significance of discourse in the creation of racial meaning. The repetition of naming practices, primarily, the continued use of the term, the Moor, helps to diminish the multi-dimensional identity of Othello to a one-dimensional racial label. This type of linguistic framing is a prime example of how to keep *Othello* and the Venetian community at a symbolic distance (Smith, 2009). In a postcolonial approach, it shows how power may be exercised subtly using such everyday language instead of the overt political exclusion.

History of reception has also demonstrated that *Othello* has been more or less sensitive to race through the ages. The common themes of jealousy and trust that earlier audiences and critics focused on were more about the universal themes, whereas the modern readers would be inclined to predict the racial aspects of the play in advance. The change implies that racial tensions are presented in the text which is more obvious when one reads it within the framework of contemporary critical analysis (Vaughan, 2016). The fact that the play is still the subject of debate is testimony to the fact that it is dense and multifaceted.

Even in the face of the available scholarship, there are still some domains to which further elaboration is possible. Other previous researches overemphasize the personal psychology or consider race as the sole explanatory predictor. It requires a middle ground in terms of which racial discourse is put into a dynamic with psychological development, dramatic structure, and social pressure. Moreover, postcolonial theory has been extensively used to the *Othello* but not all studies follow in detail the language of otherness as it progressively unfolds throughout the play.

Specifically, internalized otherness process should be given more long-term consideration. Constant exposure to the suspicion of racial inferiority may cause the receiving of the negative cultural messages into the self-perception of the marginalized figures (Fanon, 1967). The alternating patterns of speech of *Othello*, between cool authority and the internal shattering of emotions, are a great indication of the process taking place. An in-depth linguistic/thematic analysis may thus enhance our knowledge of the external prejudice of internal psychological crisis.



The current work is based on the experience of the previous research but is also intended to provide a more explicit combination of theory and in-depth reading of the text. Through paying attention to the most important episodes, the examples of racial discourse, and the instances of identity loss, the study aims to demonstrate in practical terms how *Othello* creates and maintains the image of the racial Other. Thus, it will add to the current academic debate on the topic of race, representation, and power in Shakespearean tragedy.

3. Methodology of Research

This paper will use a qualitative textual analysis based on the postcolonial theory. The objective is to explore the construction of race and otherness in the play *Othello* by Shakespeare using a systematic and critical reading of the play. The analysis of this study should be qualitative since the investigation is based on language, representation and meaning and not a numerical measurement. It enables the researcher to investigate how the racial discourse is conducted through the speech of characters, the interaction between the characters on the stage, as well as the plot.

It is interpreted in terms of the major postcolonial ideas referring to Edward Said (1978), Homi K. Bhabha (1994), and Ania Loomba (2002). The idea of othering expressed by Said could help understand how *Othello* is portrayed as culturally and racially different in Venetian society. The concepts of ambivalence, mimicry and conditional belonging formulated by Bhabha are useful in interpreting the shaky status of *Othello* between acceptance and rejection. Loomba in his analysis of Shakespeare and the discourse of colonialism aids the historical contextualization of race during the early modern era. These theoretical frames do not work in a mechanistic manner and instead they are an interpretive guide that aids in exposing patterns that were already there in the text.

The paper will be based on the close analysis of the chosen main scenes of *Othello*. Close reading allows one to pay close attention to the choice of words, tone, imagery, and the form of conversation. The primary corpus of analysis comprises of four main textual moments:

- Description of Othello by Iago and Roderigo (Act 1, Scene 1)
- The scene of the Venetian Senate (Act 1, Scene 3).
- Othello speeches afterwards when he is manipulated by Iago (particularly act 3, scene 3 and act 4, scene 1).

Scene 2 is the final tragic scene (Act 5).

The choice of these scenes is due to the fact that they are the pivots in the identity formation of *Othello*. Racial framing of the protagonist is determined with the help of the opening scene. The scene in the Senate demonstrates his provisional approval of the Venetian rule. The psychological consequences of manipulation and increasing levels of self-doubt are displayed in the middle acts. The last scene reveals the entire tragic results of internalized otherness.

In the course of analysis, the particular focus is made on four dimensions that are interdependent:

To start with, racial language and visuals. This paper explores the usage of words involving color, images of animals, foreignness and magic to characterize *Othello*. These terms are examined in terms of



frequency, context, and speakers and in this way, it is possible to trace the way people produce and propagate racial meaning throughout the play.

Second, inclusion and exclusion patterns. The study explores times when Othello has been formally incorporated (e.g. by the Duke) and when Othello has been socially or psychologically marginalized according to the Venetian standard. This assists in bringing out the conditional belonging.

Third, periods of identity crisis. Specific emphasis is made on how Othello changes his self-representation throughout the play. The alterations in his speech pattern, tone of his emotions and self-description is discussed as the evidence of internalized otherness and developing insecurity.

Fourth, dialogue relations of power. Partially influenced by discourse-oriented theories, the analysis notes how the control of conversation exists between characters and particularly between Iago and Othello. Turn-taking, hesitation, repetition, and persuasive framing are also discussed in order to demonstrate how linguistic power helps to reach the tragic conclusion.

The study is historically sensitive through the analysis. It is not aimed at transferring modern racial categories onto an early modern text. The research instead aims at showing how early modern modes of racial thought and cultural difference preempt subsequent colonial trends as postcolonial theorists identify them. The methodology is intended to establish a balance between textual faithfulness and critical acumen, by reading the play in its historical moment, but with the help of carefully chosen theoretical instruments.

Overall, the methodological design used in this study is a combination of close literary reading and postcolonial theory to give an honest and narrow analysis of race and otherness in *Othello*. It enables the research to go beyond the line of detailed textual analysis and the use of wider cultural interpretation without losing its clarity and analytical accuracy.

4. Analysis

4.1. Constructing *Othello* as the “Other”

The opening scene introduces racial difference as one of the main organizing forces in the play by Othello. Importantly, Othello is not introduced to the stage in the beginning. Rather, the audience gets to know him by the hostile portrayals of Iago and Roderigo. The significance of this dramatic strategy is that Othello is being positioned as an object of discussion prior to him becoming a speaking subject. His identity is not created by him, but first by other people in postcolonial terms.

Othello is a well-known phrase of Iago who states that this man is an old black ram / Is tuppung your white ewe (Shakespeare, 2006, 1.1.88-89). The images of the violent animals are very exposing. It degrades Othello to a beast and makes a clear contrast between black and white. The line is not a mere insult to Othello; it stirs up a symbolic system where race disparity is associated with threat and chaos. This kind of representation can be characterized as the dehumanizing logic employed to describe the racial Other as determined by the postcolonial theory (Said, 1978).

The stress on color difference is also repeated, which reveals the anxiety of interracial marriage. Desdemona is now and then linked with innocence, aristocracy, and whiteness whereas Othello is referred to as dark and alien. Such antagonism supports the notion that the fact that they are together disrupts the desired social order. Fear of racial mixing was a common sentiment in early modern English



culture, and this fear is evident in the play as characters like Brabantio reacted so strongly toward it. It is the play therefore that enacted anxieties regarding racial mix up and boundary crossing in culture (Loomba, 2002, p. 91).

Even during the time of praise, Othello identity is different. The Duke refers to him as valiant Othello (1.3.47), and the compliment admission to his military worth notwithstanding, emphasizes his otherness. He is respected in what he does, but he does not ever become completely absorbed in the Venetian social body. This symbolic distance is carried on by the recurrent mentioning of Othello as the Moor in the play.

This ambivalence of inclusion and exclusion is the key feature of postcolonial interpretation of the play. Othello has to be in Venice due to his military experience particularly in the war against the Turks. Meanwhile, he is also culturally vulnerable. His acceptance is based on utility and not complete membership. This precarious stand is one that Shakespeare builds up right at the start as a precursor to the tragedy later on.

In *Othello*, language acts as one of the most potent tools with help of which racial meaning is created. The use of racialized vocabulary is crucial to Iago in particular, in his attempt to define the perception of others regarding the Moor. The constant mention of the term the Moor makes the identity of Othello more complex and reduces it to the one racial group. This is a big cut considering that it restricts the way other characters- and the audience- can be welcome to read the behavior of Othello.

Attitudes of the early modern culture tended to associate blackness to danger, uncontrolled sexuality and moral instability (Hall, 1995). These associations are sources of strength in the rhetoric that is adopted by Iago. He does not have to present concrete evidence against Othello, but he roused up the recognisable cultural anxieties. It is this fact that can be used to understand why his recommendations were so widespread within the Venetian community.

One of the most telling scenes is the one where Othello is accused by Brabantio of witchcraft in order to capture the love of Desdemona:

She is raped, stolen out of my possession and corrupted. With witchcraft and drugs purchased through mountebanks (Shakespeare, 2006, 1.3.6061).

In this case, race is associated with an element of witchcraft and unnatural power. Brabantio is unable to digest the fact that Desdemona could love Othello by choice. Rather he interprets the marriage using a paradigm whereby the foreign is seen as deceptive. This is a common trend in terms of post colonials where cultures that are not familiar are depicted as dangerous or mad.

In spite of these antagonistic constructions, Othello at first has opposed the stereotypes imposed on him. His address to the Senate is controlled, calm and oratory. He modestly claims:

Rude am I, speechless, and not much blessed with the sweet compose of peace (1.3.8182).

The sarcasm of this statement is evident. The following speech is very eloquent and convincing. Othello complies with all the rules of rhetorical style which was appreciated by the Venetian government. This scene implies that there is a momentary transgression of culture. Othello manages to play the role he is supposed to play in the Venetian political culture through restrained language and suppressed emotion (Greenblatt, 1980).



But this success is a weak one. The racial discourse has planted the seeds of doubt, which continue to exist under the surface.

4.2. Conditional Acceptance and Fragile Belonging.

In the initial scenes of the play, Othello is well rooted in the Venetian society. He is also a high ranking military officer, the Duke trusts him and he is married to a noble family. Postcolonial theory however advocates a closer look on whether this inclusion is secure or not. Power systems frequently permit more or less toleration of foreigners without necessitating more profound systems of exclusion.

Here the concept of conditional belonging comes in handy. Social systems often allow the participation of the Other, but under certain conditions that may alter very fast. This trend is highly felt in the life of Othello. His power is also directly related to his military utility. The suspicions that were seen towards him racially re-occur at a rapid rate when his domestic life is shaken.

The turning point starts with the psychological manipulation of Iago. It is interesting to note that Iago seldom gives direct evidence. In its place, he employs pausing, insinuating, and judicious silence. The strategy is depicted by his well-known warning:

O, take caution my lord, of envy; it is the green-eyed monster (3.3.165-166).

The caution seems genial, yet it puts a question of doubts on the thought of Othello. Since Othello is already in a socially vulnerable role, the suggestion easily sinks in. This manipulation is possible not only due to the cunning nature of Iago but also due to the fact Othello is what I would call his belonging is never solid.

This instability is further promoted by the marriage between Othello and Desdemona. Their marriage traverses strong social and racial lines that is symbolically weak in the Venetian culture (Loomba, 2002). Once the suspicion comes into the equation, Othello starts to wonder whether he is the right person to stay in the world, where he is serving.

4.3. Internalized Otherness

A major contribution of the postcolonial theory is the fact that a system of domination in most cases has both internal and external manifestations. With time, the negative images directed to marginalized people may start permeating them. The psychological change in *Othello* also adheres to this trend.

Othello is clear and confident in the beginning acts. His speech is moderate, formal and restrained. As the power of the Iago is increasing, however, the speech of Othello becomes more and more fragmentary and emotional. This language transformation is good indication of internal change.

An important scene is when Othello is meditating on his personal dissimilarity:

“Haply, for I am black. And have not those sweet sections of the talk, that chambers have (pp. 263 - 265).

In this case, Othello makes a direct relationship between his lack of security and his racial identity. The stereotype that exists in the outside has been internalized. He starts to perceive himself in the same perspective as his adversaries. This mental trend indicates the harmful consequences of racialization outlined in the postcolonial theory (Fanon, 1967).



The increasing self-doubt in *Othello* makes him less critical in assessing the claims of Iago. His tragic downfall thus arises not just because of outside intervention but also due to the inner imposed pressure which he experiences because he is in a racially suspicious world.

4.4. Jealousy, Masculinity and colonial Anxiety

Though, the emotional driving force of the tragedy is jealousy, there is a postcolonial reading that the jealousy of Othello is enhanced due to racial insecurity. The early modern European discourse tended to depict black men as being sexually threatening or unruly. These fears are hinted upon by Iago many times, making Othello shape his imagination indirectly.

Iago undermines the manhood of Othello by insinuating that the woman could be having affairs. The general starts to envisage betrayal in all more corporeal and violent ways. His words become more violent and disjointed. The transformation indicates the way in which individual emotion is caught up in the wider cultural fears.

Othello does not fear being betrayed but that he is made to look foolish in a society that already regards him as different. His emotional crisis is thus related to a reputation, manhood, and race issues. These dynamics are indicative of so-called racial imagination of the early modern era (Singh, 2007).

4.5. The Last Scene and the Frontiers of Assimilation

At the last act, Othello tries to bring his story under his control with a well-orchestrated last time speech. He requests that he should remember him as a person who loved foolishly, but loved too much (5.2.344). This remark demonstrates that the tragic story should be put in an individual, but not racial context. Othello reveals himself as an emotional man.

Nevertheless, self-positioning, too, is present in the speech. Othello remembers how he used to attack a turbaned Turk (5.2.353). By doing that, he identifies himself symbolically with the Venetian authority by punishing another character, identified as foreign. This action denotes a bid to stabilize his identity by associating with the mainstream culture.

This moment may be interpreted in a postcolonial way as mimicry, which is the attempt by an outsider to find the belonging by imitating the values of the dominant group (Bhabha, 1994). But it is too late the effort. The tragedy reveals how far the process of assimilation can go in a society based on a racial hierarchy.

Othello is able to serve Venice and speak its language and embrace its values. Still, he is not able to completely rid himself of the stigma of otherness that has been trailing upon him since the start of the play.

5. Results and Discussion

Through the close reading of *Othello* using the postcolonial framework, a number of results are interrelated. The following analysis reveals that race is not a background factor that is not particularly minor in the play but a structural force that determines the relations between the characters, their psychological development and the tragic outcome. These findings can be tabulated into four key outcomes of how *Othello* is systematically constructed as the racial Other, how language is used to preserve racial hierarchy, how otherness is internalized and the constraints of assimilation in Venetian



society. Collectively, these findings endorse the claim that the downfall of Othello is closely related to the racial thinking of the early modern period.

5.1. Race as Structural Not Decorative.

The initial significant conclusion is that racial difference is a structural principle in the play. Even the very first scene defines *Othello* as someone described by outside factors before Othello can voice his opinion. An old black ram, a picture created by Iago (Shakespeare, 2006, 1.1.88) creates the racial frame, which predetermines a certain perception of the audience. This framing is not the only one, it is repeated in many different ways in the drama.

The constant application of the term the Moor minimizes Othello to race. He is seldom known in short as Othello. This linguistic trend proves that the identity is formed in accordance with naming. The discussion confirms that even in case Othello is in power, racial marking does not change. The fact that he is successful in the military does not obliterate the social boundary.

This observation correlates with the fact that the Western cultural systems tend to establish their identity through creating a racial Other (Said, 1978). In *Othello*, Venice establishes its order in part contrasted with the Moor. The contrast between Othello and the identity that Venetians seem to be makes his difference a point of reference.

5.2. Conditional Acceptance and Social Fragility

The second important finding is on the unstable position that Othello occupies socially. Initially, he seems to be totally accepted. He controls the army of Venice, addresses the Senate, and is publicly respected. The analysis, however, shows that this is a conditional acceptance. It is to a great extent dependent on his utility to the state.

When Othello is defending himself before the Senate, his speech is conciliatory. He does what should be done in the Venetian political culture. But the readiness with which Brabantio level charges of witchcraft at him demonstrates that a feeling of racial mistrust is never too distant. Prejudice that existed before is soon rejuvenated once his domestic life goes bad.

This trend is indicative of an even greater trend in postcolonial theory: regimes of power permit some partial inclusion of the Other and leave intact more fundamental regimes of exclusion (Bhabha, 1994). The belonging of Othello is thus weak. He is a respected soldier, rather than quite an equal member of society.

The consequence of this weakness is mental weakness. Since the role that *Othello* play relies on upholding honor and control, any form of reputation threat is especially malicious. The fact that *Othello* is already insecure about his belonging is one of the reasons why the manipulation by Iago is successful.

5.3. Language as a Tool of Power

The analysis also shows that language is a key process of racial control. Iago seldom puts across direct evidence. He rather goes by suggestion, repetition and racial imagery to influence the perception. His plan demonstrates how discourse may create reality.

The statement of Brabantio, who says that Desdemona has been corrupted / By spells and medicines (Shakespeare, 2006, 1.3.6061), becomes evidence of the fact that it is possible to associate the racial



difference with the sense of unnatural behavior so fast. The unknown is taken as a threat. This tendency indicates the early modern cultural correlations of blackness with moral disorganization (Hall, 1995).

Notably, *Othello* is at first opposed to these constructions. His speech before the Senate is a dignified one and destroys the stereotype of irrationality. But, as the play moves on, racial language power takes an internal instead of an external form. *Othello* starts to use the same discourse that is applied to him.

He identifies his insecurity to his racial identity when he writes, Haply, for I am black (3.3.263). This is the point of findings in this research. It illustrates the shift towards external labelling to inner self-doubt. It is not solely the lies of Iago, that bring the tragedy about but about the social world given larger contexts in which such lies become credible.

5.4. Otherness Within and Psychological Breakdown

One significant finding of the analysis is that internalized otherness is a motivation factor in the collapse of *Othello*. In the initial part of the play, the language used by *Othello* is regulated. Later on it is broken and violent. This change is not accidental; it consists of a psychological change.

The frequent incidents of racial suspicion undermine the self-esteem of *Othello*. When he starts picturing what Desdemona could do to him, he also imagines himself as a socially incompetent person. Such an internal struggle is a reflection of the psychological consequences of the process of racialization outlined in postcolonial theory (Fanon, 1967). The subject starts perceiving himself through the antagonistic eyes of people.

The instability of emotions experienced by *Othello* cannot be divided by his racial insecurity. His feeling of jealousy is enhanced by the fact that he is afraid that he does not entirely belong to the Venetian society. The message that Desdemona could want a more Venetian person is a potential threat to his marriage and his identity as well.

This finding underscores the need to study race and psychology as a combination. The tragedy is neither social nor personal, but it can only form as the result of their interaction.

5.5. Masculinity and Racial Anxiety.

What is also evident in the discussion of masculinity is that this concept is very instrumental in influencing how *Othello* reacts to doubt. Early modern European culture stereotyped black men as being oversexed or uncontrolled. This cultural script is manipulated by Iago indirectly.

By provoking *Othello* to consider the infidelity of Desdemona, Iago makes racial insecurity a masculine humiliation. This change is indicated in the violent language used by *Othello* in the subsequent acts. He is too scared of being betrayed, but more so of being humiliated publicly. Since he is already in a marginal position, the potential of dishonor becomes unbearable.

This movement endorses the hypothesis that *Othello* is representative of wider cultural fears of race, purity, and authority (Singh, 2007). The social meaning cannot be separated with personal emotion.

5.6. The Limits of Assimilation



The last outcome refers to the boundaries of assimilation. In the final speech, Othello tries to restore his honor by putting himself in a position of a servant of Venice. He remembers how he killed a turban wearing Turk (5.2.353) and somehow identifies himself with the state against a foreign personality.

Such a gesture demonstrates an act of trying to gain belongingness through association with the Venetian power. Nevertheless, the act is not victorious but sad. It implies that the only means to regain honor that Othello has is to kill himself. Assimilation has failed.

The discussion thus validates that the tragedy of *Othello* reveals the boundaries of social mobility in a racially identifiable cultural. He is able to conform to the language and ideals of Venetian culture, but he cannot take away the mark of otherness stuck to his flesh.

5.7. Overall Interpretation

Collectively, the findings indicate that *Othello* has dramatized the multi-faceted nature of racial othering in the way it creates, reinforces, and internalizes it. Race has various levels such as linguistic, social, psychological, and symbolic. It is a combination of these levels, which results in the tragedy and not one of them.

A postcolonial reading does not refute the agency or emotional responsibility of *Othello*. Rather, it places his decisions in a cultural context that is dictated by racial hierarchy. The play exposes the anticipation of subsequent colonial patterns of representation in the early modern concept of difference.

To sum up, the findings confirm the main argument of this paper *Othello* cannot be so easily judged without references to the role of race and otherness. The play is a very strong incisive on how exclusion in society, the racial language, and self-imposed insecurity can lead to tragic outcomes.

6. Conclusion

Through a postcolonial interpretation of *Othello*, one will discover that the play is very interested in race, identity, and belonging. Shakespeare introduces Othello as a character that is respected and marginalized in the society of Venetians. The play reveals the construction and maintenance of otherness through the use of racial language, social suspicion, and psychological pressure.

The discussion shows that it is not the jealousy that causes Othello to fall. His tragedy has a lot to do with the precariousness of his acceptance in Venice. Although he is initially seen as a part of the world, the fast reveal of racial suspicion makes it clear that he was not as safe as he had been initially assumed.

Language is very potent in this process. The manipulation of Iago works since it triggers the fear of blackness, sexuality and foreignness that are inherent in the culture. Othello in the course of time builds up these fears within him and the fear undermines his self-confidence and judgment.

Othello is a product of postcolonial anxiety concerning the contact of cultures and race. The play *foresees* future colonial trends where racial Other has to be needed and feared. The last effort of Othello to recover honor brings out the tragic constraints of assimilation in a differentiated society.

Simply stated, *Othello* is not merely a piece about jealousy and betrayal. It is also an influential investigation of the forms that race and otherness makes identity, relationships, and power. The application of the postcolonial theory in reading the play enables the contemporary reader to comprehend that it remains relevant in the debate on race and representation.

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