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**Representations of Blackness in
contemporary cinematic
adaptations of Shakespeare:
The case of Othello**

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1 INTRODUCTION

As communication systems nowadays reach every corner of the world, the importance of mass media has never been greater (Castañeda, 2018). As a dynamic social force that uses visual, audio, and textual techniques, mass media shapes civil society, influencing discourses, policies, and the physical environments that surround us (Schiller, 2014). Media has become a key player in constructing and disseminating narratives that shape perceptions and societal attitudes toward race. Understanding the media's communicative influence is vital for making informed decisions and unraveling misrepresentations of racial and ethnic populations (Castañeda, 2018). Similarly, literature has been a fundamental mode of communication. It serves as a platform for emotional expression, the conveyance of ideas, and a narrative tool for exploring social events and historical periods. In the words of Ramírez (2004), "given that the practice of writing is a social practice, every text materializes the various voices and socio-historical and socio-cultural contradictions of the social and ideological formations that originate it" (p. 249, translated from Spanish). Recognizing literature as a social and cultural practice highlights its potential role in producing and perpetuating discriminatory ideologies like racism, sexism, homophobia, and xenophobia (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017). Understanding literature's profound impact on shaping ideologies underscores the urgency for change. If literature reflects society, then societal transformation should prompt a corresponding shift in the perpetuation of discriminatory ideologies through literary works. By scrutinizing both media and literature, we can gain insight into the intersectionality between the two and uncover how adaptations of classical works, such as *Othello*, contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding race in contemporary media.

2 PURPOSE AND REASON FOR RESEARCH

Driven by my passion for literature, its symbolism, and the effects classical literary pieces have on modern societies, I decided to study the relationship between contemporary adaptations of literary classics and the media regarding the representation of race, specifically representations of Blackness.

This topic is pertinent today as societies are becoming more complex and heterogeneous, while Western nations continue to be organized along the lines of race, especially in the economic, social, and political fields (Saha, 2021). For instance, the results of the 2023 survey conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights prove that half of the individuals of African descent in the EU experience racial discrimination, an increase from 39 % in 2016 to 45 % in 2022 (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2023). Since media is nowadays the biggest institution in the field of cultural production, it is important to understand the role that media plays in reproducing traditional inaccurate representations of race that lead to racist tendencies (Saha, 2021).

That is why I decided to study how the adaptations of literary classical works serve as a vehicle for either perpetuating or fighting traditional representations of race and portrayals of the Other in mass media. The purpose is to find the convergence point between classical literature and mass media in terms of representations of race. To achieve this, I will focus on how the characters of the Other are modified and adjusted in modern adaptations, and whether these adjustments perpetuate or challenge traditional race representations. Specifically, this will be conducted through an examination of one of the classical works of the author William Shakespeare, *Othello*, and two of its numerous contemporary adaptations; both released in 2001, the first one is the American film *O* by Tim Blake Nelson, and the British television film *Othello* by Geoffrey Sax.

To carry out this analysis I will apply two theories: the Theory of the Other and the Cultural Critical Approach, since both are benchmark theories that examine societal dynamics and power structures about representations of race. However, I acknowledge the existence of other theories that could fit this work: the Theory of Representation by Stuart Hall, which examines how meaning is created and conveyed through representations, or the Theory of Adaptation by Linda Hutcheon which explores the relationship between original texts and their adaptations.

3 CONTEXT

3.1 Contextualizing race

According to the 2023 American Psychological Association Dictionary, race is “the social construction and categorization of people based on perceived shared physical traits that result in the maintenance of a sociopolitical hierarchy. The term is also loosely applied to geographic, cultural, religious, or national groups” (para.1). According to Anamik Saha, the modern conception of race has its roots in the eighteenth century with the Enlightenment period, an intellectual and philosophical movement that emphasized reason and rationality in understanding humanity. Enlightenment thinkers began ordering the natural world according to scientific methods and applied the same approach to humankind itself, so race became a category to arrange mankind into groups with the same biological features and qualities. Afterward, the idea of race became a justification for colonialism, empire, and enslavement during the expansion of capitalism to the rest of the world. Different races were categorized into a hierarchy of superiority with the Europeans at the top of evolution and civilization, which allowed them to discriminate and abuse other races (Saha, 2021). The highest stage of civilization, according to the theory of cultural evolution by the anthropologist Henry Lewis Morgan, is that of an urban society that uses a phonetic alphabet and produces literary records (Morgan, 1964). Subsequently, the concept of race became embedded in the foundation of the modern state, with conceptions of race and whiteness becoming central to the formation of Western States (Saha, 2021). As we can see, there is an ideological origin for the concept of race and there is no scientific foundation for this concept (Saha, 2021).

According to Anamik Saha, Western societies have become increasingly complex, heterogeneous, and mixed. However, race thinking remains deeply rooted, placing people into seemingly coherent, bounded groups based on supposedly shared physical or cultural traits that are difficult to change. Furthermore, race is not merely how different groups are made distinguishable; in the West, those who are racialized as Other are generally seen as inferior. For example, according to Drake (1987), “during the 18th and 19th century slavery was justified with the argument that Negroes were an inferior animal-like breed of mankind unfit to be treated as equals” (p.25). Minority groups are exploited to fuel capitalism and maintain the dominance of the white race worldwide (Saha, 2021).

However, during the last century, there has been a series of movements that have challenged this subjugation of races and that are fighting towards reducing and eventually

eliminating race inequalities. Just to mention an example, the civil rights movements in the United States during the 20th century: From 1954 to 1968 there were a series of events that intended to eliminate legal racial segregation and discrimination. This movement is part of a wave pushing back against unfair treatment based on race differences in social hierarchy (Jackson, 2007)

It is important to mention that these social movements are closely linked to the concept of social justice, which is generally defined as the egalitarian distribution of wealth and income, to ensure economic equality (Young, 2011). However, this definition places an excessive emphasis on economic aspects, as Saha (2021) says “for feminists, anti-racists, and queer activists, while the economic need is of course important, actions based solely on class politics do not attend to specific types of oppression that women, people of color and sexual minorities face that entail forms of cultural stigmatization” (p.10). The policies needed are those that respect difference, where minorities are no longer expected to assimilate to dominant/majority culture/norms (Saha, 2021). For Yung (2011), this entails “the demand for non-stereotype media representation of racial and ethnic groups as a way of “no distributive forms of justice” that includes “the symbols, images, meanings, habitual compartments” through which people express their experience and communicate which is other” (p.26). Framing the problem of race and racial oppression in terms of social justice is important since it frames it as an important political issue for our societies (Saha, 2021).

In the current landscape, we are witnessing the time of the so-called Woke generation, which sees the negative portrayal of racial and ethnic minorities in popular cultures and the news as a matter of gross injustice and has mobilized to change it (Saha, 2021). From social media campaigns that expose “whitewashing”, to criticizing the representation of Black women on magazine covers to meet beauty standards, this generation is focused on how racialized groups are represented in media due to the role that it plays in their lives (Nelson K. , 2016).

3.2 Race in the media.

3.2.1 Relationship between race and media

According to Julia McDougall (2012), media can be defined as “the means of communication, such as television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and the internet, that reach or influence people widely” (p.181). With 4.8 billion social media users worldwide,

125 million TV households in the US in 2024, and 60% of the population online in 2020 (Hannah Ritchie, 2023). It is important to grasp the role that media plays in maintaining traditional representations of race due to its relevance nowadays as the main outlet through which we consume them (Saha, 2021).

Firstly, to understand the relationship between race and the media, we need to address the concept of culture. According to Mary Godwyn and Jody Hoffer Gittell, in their 2012 book *Sociology of Organizations*, “Culture can be defined as a pattern of shared basic assumptions, invented discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and is how they perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems” (p.15). It is through culture that the floating signifier of race is fixed (Saha, 2021). A floating signifier is a term in semiotics coined by the philosopher Ferdinand de Saussure, that refers to a symbol, word, or image that lacks a fixed or specific meaning and can therefore be interpreted in various ways depending on context, culture, or individual perception (Saussure, 1916). As we have already stated, race is a social construct with no actual material basis and is created through a historical process that changes over time due to transformations in the political-economic and socio-cultural spheres. Unpacking the meanings attached to race necessitates a focus on culture, as culture constitutes the symbols, narratives, values, and beliefs through which meaning is constructed – and by extension representations (Saha, 2021). Moreover, language and culture work through representations, which refer to how meaning is constructed and conveyed through language, images, symbols, and other forms of communication. They are how we understand and make sense of the world around us, shaping our perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes about race (Saha, 2021). Representations are not direct reflections of reality but are rather interpretations influenced by social, cultural, and historical contexts (Hall, *The spectacle of the other*, 1997). Subsequently, media plays an essential role in constructing meaning around race through representations because it is the major producer of representations within societies (Saha, 2021).

In addition, when we talk about representations of race within media, it is crucial to point out that this refers to the dominant culture that retains power hegemonically through the media. The concept of hegemony refers to the way the dominance of the powerful is sustained in industrial capitalist society. It is a system of ideas and practices that are continually upheld and revised, with the media playing a crucial role in this process. (Gramsci, 1971). According to Saha (2021) “the media make

race a form of governmentality that allows the dominant culture to secure power hegemonically by decoding what ideas around race take hold and become common sense in society” (p.13). Moreover, Stuart Hall proposes that:

Hegemony is never fixed, and it is always subject to struggle. Cultural hegemony is never about pure victory or pure domination; it is never a zero-sum cultural game; it is always about shifting the balance of power in the relations of culture; it is always about changing the dispositions and configurations of cultural power, not getting out of it (Hall, Notes on deconstructing "the popular", 1981, p. 227)

This idea is also analyzed by Professor Barnor Hesse (2000), who created the concept of “*racialized governmentalities*”, meaning that ideas are managed and manipulated by the dominant culture to maintain their position of power (p.29). Therefore, we can conclude that media and culture can be analyzed from the standpoint of a site of ideological struggle where hegemony is fought over by opposing sides (Saha, 2021).

To continue, it is important to lay down the approach we will apply to understand the relationship between race and media. In this case, we propose that race is made by the media rather than just represented by it. For example, the adaptations chosen for this analysis do not only rescue the Otherness in the original play, but also add new layers to the character of *Othello* to create a different but still Othered version. According to Anamik Saha in 2021, “this idea of race making within the media best describes the relationship between media, culture, and race, avoiding over simplistic discussions solely based on whether race representations are positive/negative, authentic/stereotypical, truth/false” (p. 15).

3.2.2 Analysis of race in the media

To begin with, there are a series of techniques used in media to perpetuate the figure of the Other. The definition of these techniques lays the foundation for a comprehensive analysis that delves into both historical precedents and contemporary dynamics surrounding the portrayal of race in media.

The first one is stereotyping; according to cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall (1997), “it is a form of “amplified typification”, the process of reducing people to several essential qualities and traits, which are in turn exaggerated and simplified, and in turn again fixed” (p.257). Stereotypes imply the reproduction of power and are often directed towards the subordinate. As a form of power/knowledge they produce the idea of the norm (who fits it) and the Other (those who do not). The power of dominant ideology is to convert stereotypes into truths. Even when we recognize that they are clear exaggerations, the power of stereotypes is that we come to believe they contain a hint of truth (Saha, 2021). For instance, the most typical stereotype of the Black Community is their criminalization, which portrays Black people as inherently violent and inclined to criminality (Oliver, 2003).

Then, “whitewashing” is a racist practice in popular media of either removing visible minorities by lightening their skin or entirely replacing them with white actors (Nelson K. , 2016). This practice was widely used: white actors portraying characters of color would alter their appearances, often using blackface or yellowface, and putting on exaggerated accents and movements (Scherker, 2017). An example is the homonym adaptation by Orson’s Welles of Shakespeare’s play *Othello* in 1952, where he played the Black protagonist coloring his face in black.

In addition, Riccuci (2002) defines tokenism as “the practice or policy of admitting an extremely small number of members of racial (e.g. African American), ethnic (e.g. Latino) or gender (i.e. women) groups... to give the impression of being inclusive, when in actuality these groups are not welcomed” (p. 132). According to Megan Ruby (2020) “Men and women of color are used as tokens by perpetuating a stereotype of the white imagination of how people of color act in the ways white people expect them to. For instance, in the show *Big Bang Theory*, the Indian American Rajesh stereotypically has an accent, and is super smart, but is socially awkward” (p.675–680).

Then, colonial narratives are the narratives put forward by colonizers, especially about marginalized and colonized people. These narratives create a binary distinction between colonizer and colonized, as the Other and the Self. An example is the traditional colonial narrative of Minnesota about Indians, which portrays them as a homogenous and doomed indigenous population – destined to fail due to their lack of resistance to disease,

their inherently violent culture, and their struggles to adapt to change (Colonial Narratives, s.f.)

Moreover, another tendency that is prominent in the media is “colorism” which according to “The Color Purple” author Alice Walker (1982), is when preferential or discriminatory treatment is given to people of the same race based on their skin color (Walker, 1982). In the case of media Colorism, it is the casting of lighter-skinned actors into key roles to appeal to a wider audience (Gay, 2014).

Finally, the 2024 Encyclopedia Britannica defines cultural appropriation as “the phenomenon of the adoption of certain language, behavior, clothing, or tradition belonging to a minority culture or social group by a dominant culture or group in a way that is exploitative, disrespectful, or stereotypical” (para.1). An imbalance of power between the appropriator and the appropriated is a critical condition of the concept (Kendall, 2024).

Through an exploration and definition of these key concepts and phenomena, we have laid out the predominant tendencies and dynamic shifts in the portrayal of race within the media landscape over the past century. As we conclude this section, it becomes evident that understanding these dynamics is essential for a holistic understanding of the complexity of racial narratives in media, providing a foundation for further examination and critical reflection.

3.2.3 Traditional Depictions of the Black 'Other' in Media

A predominant tendency in the media has been to portray a negative image of the racialized Other, the Other usually being Black people, “moors”, migrants, Latinos, Jews, and Muslims among others. Specifically, the role of racial ideology through history has been to construct the Black subject as Other to create and maintain racial hierarchies. This involves an account of the ongoing stereotyping of Black culture (Saha, 2021).

According to Stuart Hall in 1997, there are three main narratives for the representation of the Black Other character (p.245). The first one is that black characters in the media are explicitly degraded, seen as lazy, criminal, deviant, feckless. Secondly,

they are sentimentalized, referring to tropes of the noble savage, Uncle Tom, the Mammy figure. The third one is happy natives particularly in the form of black entertainers. The last two might seem positive: they are nonetheless simplified and reinforce racial hierarchies. Each of these tropes have their roots in colonialism/slavery and persist in modern day representations of Black people.

Furthermore, to show the differences between the Other and the Self, they are presented as complete opposites. White people are described as intellectual, while Black people are seen as more emotional, reinforcing racial stereotypes of "emotion versus intellect" and "nature versus culture" (Hall, *The spectacle of the other*, 1997). Moreover, people of color are rarely given a role of authority, glamor, or virtue. They are usually used in secondary roles and rarely have their own storylines. In the case of Black women, there are several stereotypes portrayed in the media. An example is the "Angry Black Women" stereotype against African American women, which portrays them as ill-mannered or ill-tempered. Or a Black female or male character may be present only to provide sass and advance the storyline of the white main character. (Castañeda, 2018).

To conclude, it is important to point out a tendency we see nowadays related to the representation of Blackness in the media. From the 1990s onward there is a shift towards and emphasis on diversity, bringing previously silenced groups into mainstream programming. Associated with the new diversity paradigm marginal groups have gone from invisibility and exclusion in the media to exaggeration and hypervisibility. The inclusion of Black characters in productions is often driven by producers' desire to demonstrate both commercial viability and diversity, resulting in the fulfillment of industry diversity quotas. Moreover, according to Saha (2021):

"Films that feature representations of race that play on dominant themes of Blackness get privileged over films that depict racial experience in more ambiguous or challenging ways. Thus, within the diversity paradigm, the crime drama effectively becomes the dominant filmic/televisual context within which Black people appear, shaped by racial ideology and economic imperative. The fact is that Blackness is either over-determined or subsumed into a race-less version of diversity appears a contradiction, but they are opposing sides of the same diversity coin. Blackness is everywhere and nowhere in the media" (p.144)

The relationship between representations of Blackness and media is fundamental for this study, as we want to analyze how those representations are challenged or maintained in

adaptations of literary classics. The widespread practice of adapting literary classics into the new media (radio, cinema and TV) aims to bring important pieces of literary history to contemporary audiences. In this field Shakespeare is the key example: between 1959 and 2015, an average of 410 professional productions of Shakespeare's plays took place annually, according to the World Shakespeare Bibliography (2015).

3.3 Contextualization of Shakespeare

“There has not been an era that has not read Shakespeare and has not interpreted itself in the light of his prodigious creation, or has not reinterpreted it according to the measure of its fantasies and its own ghosts” (Concha, 2004, p. 9)

Shakespeare's works remain immensely relevant and timeless in contemporary society, evident in their widespread study and performance. He is celebrated as a foundation of English literature and a symbol of the English Renaissance, embodying classic British culture. His mastery of verse secured him a place in literary history, but his profound exploration of the human condition is what gave him the status of the greatest playwright of all time. Shakespeare's influence extends beyond literature, spreading to contemporary culture, including cinema, tourism, and advertising (Maryville University, 2022). His dramatic creations continue to influence the collective imagination, establishing him as a lasting figure in the realm of mass communication (McLuskie, 1999).

To begin with, William Shakespeare was a poet, author, and actor born in 1564, in Stratford-upon-Avon, in the south of England, during the Elizabethan period, an era recognized for its cultural, artistic, and theatrical flourishing. The third of eight children of John Shakespeare and Mary Arden, he received a limited formal education due to the economic difficulties encountered by his family. However, this humble background did not stop him from becoming one of the most renowned playwrights and poets of the Renaissance period in London. Shakespeare was renowned for his wise mix of genres, characters, situations, passion, humor, and misery that make up the substance of his works (Concha, 2004). During his lifetime he explored a wide number of genres, but his plays are mainly divided into comedies, tragedies, and historical plays. He died in 1616 leaving

a legacy that endures to this day, he is credited with the authorship of 154 sonnets, 38 plays, 2 narrative poems, and a variety of another poems (Fernández & Tamaro, 2004)

It is important to mention the historical trajectory of Shakespeare's relevance to understand why it is still of significance nowadays. At the end of the XVI century and the beginning of the XVII, he was a popular author concerned with the success of his plays in front of an audience that included a variety of elements of society. During the XVIII he became a symbol of English culture and with the professionalization of the literary studies between the XIX and XX centuries his works became central in the academic programs and an essential vehicle of the concepts of education and civilization in the Anglo-Saxon world. Lastly, since the middle of the 20th century, the presence of Shakespeare in the culture of mass media is unquestionable (Concha, 2004). A clear example is the fact that the Guinness Book of Records recognizes Shakespeare as the most filmed author ever in any language (Guinness World Record, 2016). This is why I have chosen Shakespeare's work as the basis for this study on the intersectionality of literary classics and media coverage of race.

3.3.1 Otherness in Shakespeare's plays

Shakespeare's timelessness and importance are not the only reason for the selection of Shakespeare for this analysis. His ability to portray Otherness in his works greatly determines it. The politics of race and culture that surround the Elizabethan writer are considered complex and were clearly influenced by his context (Hendricks, 2000). During the Elizabethan era, colonialism and international trade emerged, when differences between white Christian Europeans and the different cultures they met during their journeys became a key factor in defining social and cultural identity (Smith, 2012). The literary pieces of William Shakespeare give us insights into the dynamics of multicultural interactions during the 16th century and how was the English perception and interactions with groups unlike themselves (Smith, 2012). The two main groups of racial Others in the Elizabethan period would have been members of the Jewish religion and communities of African descent, commonly called "moors" (Smith, 2012). According to author and literary critic Ania Loomba (2002) in her book *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism*, "race was thus utilized as an instrument to wield power over a variety of minority groups, and it remains a highly malleable category which historically has been deployed to reinforce existing social hierarchies and create new ones" (p.3).

However, I will focus on “moors”, and their stereotyping solely based on their dark complexion. During the 16th century, Blackness as represented by Shakespeare was the main quality that led to the discrimination and degradation of those who possessed it. People of color were considered from a different race than most of society (Smith, 2012). Ania Loomba (2002) claims that historically, “Blackness was a symbol for a variety of differences...it represents danger, becoming a way of signifying what lies outside familiar or approved social, political, religious, and sexual structures” (p.36).

According to Jasmine Smith (2012) “Elizabethans often debated whether a person’s Blackness was merely a physical misfortune or indicative of spiritual impurity and moral depravity” (p.3). Stereotypes gradually arose from these warring opinions, as Loomba (2002), “the stages of the early modern period were rife with images of Black people as lewd, unprincipled, and evil, ugly, and repulsive (p.36).

Research has shown that people of color from Sub-Saharan Africa were mostly portrayed in this way, perpetuating the stereotype that associates Blackness with lechery (Loomba, 2002). However, “moors” from the North African region were generally considered noble, cultured and economically astute because England wanted to maintain trade relations with the Islamic nations in the region, such as Morocco. Yet, their participation in the medieval religious Crusades resulted in members of this group being depicted also as aggressive (Smith, 2012).

Several characters in Shakespeare's plays are racially depicted in a manner that reinforces the stereotypes and biases prevalent in 16th century England. As an example, in *Titus Andronicus*, one of Shakespeare’s earliest plays of 1593, the only black character is Aron, the former enslaved lover of the Queen of Goths, Tamora. He is depicted as ruthless, irreligious, and sexually unapologetic and as a wicked character who hates mankind. He represents some of the most typical stereotypes of African people at the time. There are also examples of the view of Blackness in the case of North African “moors”; this is the case of the Prince of Morocco in *The Merchant of Venice* (1597): according to Jasmine Smith (2012) “the character of the “moor” is well-educated and speaks in highly poetic verse, as the prince litters his lines with complex metaphors and classic allusions to convey the confidence he has in his strength and valor” (p.4). Thus, Shakespeare depicts North African Blackness with more tolerance than the darker “moors” due to the economic benefit to the Europeans (Smith, 2012). In conclusion, even if Shakespeare had the opportunity to learn directly about these races, most traits depicted in his works come from the old framework of assumptions about “moors”.

3.3.2 Adaptations of Shakespeare

Adaptations of Shakespeare's plays rapidly spread after his death and have persisted without cessation to the current day. In his investigation of eighteenth-century versions of Shakespeare's plays, David Wheeler (1985) notes that between 1660 and 1820, "all thirty-seven of Shakespeare's plays were revised" (p.1) with a total of at least 123 adaptations during this time. The earliest recorded film based on a work by William Shakespeare dates to the 19th century. Specifically, to the year 1899, when Walter Pfeffer Dando and William K.L. Dickson directed "*King John*". In this case, it was an English production, but since then, Shakespeare's works have been the subject of adaptations in filmographies worldwide, from America to Japan, passing through Australia, Canada, Russia, or China. These include Akira Kurosawa's now classic *Throne of Blood* (*Macbeth*) and *Ran* (*King Lear*). Moreover, some adaptations have maintained the text as written by Shakespeare and others who take great liberty in their adaptations, such as the teen drama *Ten Things I Hate about You* (*Taming of the Shrew*) and *Prospero's Books* (*The Tempest*). Due to the abundance of adaptations of Shakespeare's works, there is a wealth of literature that not only lists film titles for the big screen but also for television or video, filmed theater, series, filmed operas, computer programs, CD-ROMs, video disks, and other transpositions of his work. For example, in television, *Slings and Arrows* is an adaptation that follows the actors and producers who live in a Canadian Shakespeare festival. Likewise, the digital age has led to new possibilities for adapting Shakespeare, including online games, YouTube series, comics, or even memes (Wheeler, 1985).

In terms of cinematic adaptations, the subject of our analysis, as we have already said the Guinness World Record recognizes Shakespeare as the most filmed author with a total of 410 film and TV versions (Guinness World Record, 2016).

3.3.3 Introduction to *Othello*

For my analysis of Otherness, I have chosen the play *Othello* due to its unusual approach to race. *Othello*, or *The Moor of Venice*, is a five-act tragedy written by Shakespeare, where the main character is an outsider, in which the Self-Other dichotomy is present (Tekalp, 2014). To begin with, this play is one of the greatest and most distinguished plays of its author and it dates to 1604, when it was first performed by the

King's Men at Court. The story takes place in Venice and Cyprus, bustling places full of opportunities back then. The plot follows Iago, jealous of Othello, the Moor of Venice, who plans to get back at him for his high-ranking position by slandering his wife, Desdemona, and his lieutenant, Cassio. His schemes escalate, leading to Cassio's dismissal and Othello's descent into jealousy. Iago manipulates events, including the planting of a handkerchief of Desdemona in Cassio's lodgings to make Othello think his wife is cheating. This drives Othello to murder Desdemona. Ultimately, Emilia exposes Iago's deception, Othello, overwhelmed by remorse, takes his own life. The main themes of this tragedy are manipulation, jealousy, and power (Bentley, 1958).

In *Othello*, Shakespeare uses the principal character to examine the Othering that dark-skinned people could have faced in Elizabethan England. In the book *Shakespeare and Race* by Alexander and Wells (2002), they state that:

“at the time the religious-racial discourse was highly influential in the formation of conflicts between Same (Christians) and the Other (non-Christians), the Elizabethan’s awareness of foreigners conditioned by the traditional religious outlook of the world that situated Jews and followers of Islam as the antithesis to all Christians” (Alexander & Wells, 2000, p. 9).

In this context, Othello's Blackness symbolizes his status as the Other within Venetian society, this is evidenced by the numerous references to his complexion throughout the play. Even if Othello's origins are difficult to trace back, his Otherness depends on his difference from the original Venetians, evident in his skin color. He is a “moor” in a white Christian society where Black people were considered “aliens” (Tekalp, 2014). Hence, his skin color makes him an outsider supposed to cause disorder within society (Tekalp, 2014). Shakespeare deliberately chose to present a “moor” as his hero. He was not confused about race; he was simply more aware than his contemporaries of the complex relationship between made by whites and blacks (Alexander & Wells, 2000).

That is why, according to Jones (1965) “through the story of Othello, Shakespeare simultaneously reinforces and tears down racial Othering. Shakespeare turned a “moor” with unfavorable associations into a hero, a dramatic feat that had not previously been accomplished in early modern drama” (p.109). The typical stereotypes of the “moor” when portraying Othello were either representing him as villainous and

bestial or as aristocratic and exotic. Shakespeare creates a complex tragic hero, who, throughout most of the play contradicts the traditional stereotypes associated with “moor” (Mangione, 2014). Othello, who is a general in the Venetian army, portrays a man of color in a powerful position. He has control over other soldiers, and his men trust him and respect him. Shakespeare challenges the general stereotypes about “moors” by placing Othello in a position of power and making him kind and respected. However, in the end, Othello is reduced back to the traditional stereotype about “moors”, when in a violent rage he kills his wife. Othello is reduced to the dark-skinned Other that Elizabethan audiences were expecting to see, placing him at his expected position at the bottom of society (Cowhig, 1992).

Shakespeare challenges the validity of stereotypes by questioning the thoughts that give rise to them. Despite Shakespeare's discomfort with the defeat of marginalized characters in the end, his primary goal is to satisfy to his audience, most of whom seek their “symbolic casting out” (Tekalp, 2014). Shakespeare tries to humanize them so they can be accepted by the Christian audience with preconceived biases (Tekalp, 2014).

This is one of the reasons why I have chosen this play: Do the adaptations of *Othello* uphold nuanced representations of Blackness, or do they merely perpetuate stereotypes through the main character? Shakespeare’s play deals with issues that resonate with modern contexts, such as race, gender and sexuality, themes that were and are of universal as well as anthropological significance in the 21st century. As scholar Barbara Everett argues, “*Othello* is Shakespeare’s only tragedy set entirely in the present” (Everett, 1989). This play has been subject of several rewrites and adaptations since it was first performed in the XVII century; these adaptations have not only sought to reinterpret the plot and characters for contemporary audiences but have also used the work as a lens through which to examine relevant social, political, and cultural issues in different contexts and time periods (Faedo, 1999). For the analysis, we have chosen two modern adaptations of Shakespeare's play, both released in 2001: they explore the same themes as the original play but translated into a contemporary context. They are *O* by Tim Blake Nelson and *Othello* by Geoffrey Sax.

4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 Theory of the Other

This analysis is mainly based on the Theory of the Other, a systematic theoretical concept first coined by Indian Philosopher Gayatri C. Spivak in 1985 drawing from several philosophical and theoretical traditions. The concept comes from Hegel's master-slave dialectic, presented in his 1807 work "Phenomenology of Spirit," where he introduces the notion of the Other as a crucial component of self-consciousness (Hegel, 1979). The self can only attain self-awareness through acknowledgment from another conscious entity, thereby establishing a dialectical connection between the Self and the Other. In her 1985 essay "*The Rani of Sirmur*" Spivak was the first to systematically use the concept of Othering. According to Jensen (2011) Othering is described as "a multidimensional process, it touches upon several different forms of social differentiation, and that Othering as a concept can therefore be combined with what has later been conceptualized as intersectionality or interlocking systems of oppression in feminist theory" (p.65). In Spivak's view, the process of Othering involves classifications based on class and race, but also on gender. It's not a substitute for discussing racism, sexism, or classism but rather a method of addressing these aspects (Jensen, 2011). Jensen (2001) states that "Othering concerns the consequences of racism, sexism, class in terms of symbolic degradation as well as the processes of identity formation related to this degradation" (p.65). To sum up, the theory of identity formation inherent in the concept of Othering assumes that subordinate people are relegated to subject positions as Others in discourse. In these processes, it is the center that has the power to describe, and the Other is constructed as inferior (Jensen, 2011) Spivak's conceptualization is in accordance with contemporary uses of the concept with theorists continuing to expand and refine the theory of the Other in response to evolving social, political, and technological landscapes. For example, Postcolonial scholars such as Homi Bhabha have interrogated the power dynamics inherent in representations of the Other, exposing how dominant discourses perpetuate stereotypes and marginalization (Jensen, 2011).

Therefore, the definition of Othering, according to the International Encyclopedia of Human Geography of 2008, is the following:

It is the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in group (Us, Self) constructs one or many dominated out-groups (Them, Other). This is done

by stigmatizing a difference, that can be real or imagined, presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination (Staszak, 2008, p. 2).

The concept of Otherness involves classifying individuals into two hierarchical levels: those who belong to a group and those who do not belong. The outgroup only exists as a group because of its opposition to the in-group and its absence of a defined identity. The Other only exists in relation to the Self, and vice versa, making Otherness and identity two indivisible sides of the same coin. Jean Francois Staszak (2008) points out that “the asymmetry in power relationships is central to the construction of Others - only the dominant group can impose its identity and to devalue the Other identity while imposing corresponding discriminatory values” (p.2).

Additionally, the ethnocentric bias that creates Otherness is a common theme in anthropology, since is a natural tendency for groups to value themselves and distinguish themselves from Others whom they see as inferior (Staszak, 2008). All societies with their own set of classifications establish a distinction between the Self and the Other. However, colonization allowed Western societies to stand out in this process. The West exported its values almost everywhere through an efficient process of cultural assimilation (Staszak, 2008). A clear example is Elizabethan England, who created exaggerated legends and negative stereotypes to depreciate those who looked and behaved differently from Western European norms. Therefore, we can differentiate the Self in Shakespeare’s period as English, Christian, male, and belonging to the aristocracy or upper classes. Meanwhile, the Other would-be foreigners including Blackamoors, Spaniards, Turks, and Jews, as well as Africans (Smith, 2012). In conclusion, according to Edward Said, the West is the primary producer of a body or archive of knowledge whereby the Other is constructed and made sense of politically, sociologically, ideologically, militarily, and imaginatively, that is, in all spheres of life (Said, 1978).

One of the criticisms of the concept of Otherness is crucial for this analysis, those who are othered are not presented as active subjects. These critiques demand theoretical considerations about agency, that is the ability to act against social structures. One form of agency that is important is refusal, which relies on distancing from the category imposed by the powerful group and refusing to occupy the position of the Other (Jensen, 2011). In this analysis, we will examine whether the cinematic adaptations of *Othello* challenge and subvert pre-established race hierarchies rather than perpetuate them.

4.2 Cultural Critical Approach

In the book *Cultural Studies* (Grossberg, Nelson, & Treichler, 1992), this discipline is defined as “a politically engaged post disciplinary academic field that explores the dynamics of contemporary culture (including the politics of popular culture) and its social and historical foundation” (p.10). It was initially developed by British Marxist academics in the late 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s (Grossberg, Nelson, & Treichler, 1992). Before the emergence of this field, culture was seen as an object possessed only by the most privileged in society, but the work of early British cultural studies scholars drew attention to how culture belongs to everyone. In addition, following the influence of French structuralist thinkers such as Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Lévi-Strauss, culture came to be understood as the language through which we understand the world around us. Moreover, thanks to French post-structuralists such as Roland Barthes, cultural studies scholars came to understand this as an historical process that is shaped by social change and the development of capitalism. However, this was not focused on the study of race (Saha, 2021). The collection *The Empire Strikes Back* (1982) with contributions from students at the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies was one of the first texts to foreground race within a cultural studies framework by rejecting the notion of racism as a unitary fixed principle (Back & Solomos, 2000). In addition, the assumption of races as fixed, whole, bounded groups, which characterized the early sociological approaches to race relations was challenged. The contributors to the volume stressed that the meaning of race as a social construction is contested and fought over and that racial identity can also act as a source of collectivity and resistance. Thanks to this cultural turn in social science, we can see the emergence of what can be referred to as a critical cultural approach to race (Back & Solomos, 2000). This new tradition began to focus on the cultural dimensions of racial discourse, including questions of cultural production, cultural consumption, and media. It stressed cultural identity as fluid, hybrid and plural, and it established representations of race in media as a key object of study to understand how meaning is attached to race and ethnicity and how such meanings change over time (Hall, *Black film: British cinema*, 1988).

This analysis is broadly shaped by this critical cultural approach to race, which according to the race theorists Omi and Winant (2002), considers race as “an unstable entity that consists of multiple meanings that are constantly being made and remade through cultural and political struggle” (p.115). This means that constructions of race are

a historical process in that they change over time because of transformations within the political economic and socio-cultural spheres. In addition, it understands culture as the sphere where ideas about race are made and circulate that reinforce the racial hierarchies that characterize Western society, but also the sphere where such ideas are challenged and transformed. Therefore, it focuses on how race becomes a knowledge that structures the world and lived experience through cultural representations of race in media and discourse (Saha, 2021).

5 METHODOLOGY

This paper will provide an answer to the following questions:

- How has the representation of race evolved in modern adaptations of Shakespeare?
- To what extent do contemporary adaptations of Shakespeare perpetuate the continued silencing and stereotyping of those racialized as Others in media or are they modified to challenge racial power structures and hierarchies in present-day society?
- According to the Cultural critical approach, ideas of race are constantly being made and remade, how do the adaptations of Shakespeare's literary classics represent this idea?

The core objective of this analysis is to provide an appropriate answer to the questions above, to conclude how representations of race have evolved in modern adaptations and if they reinforce or challenge traditional hierarchies of race. To do so, we will analyze two contemporary cinematic adaptations of *Othello* that were released in 2001. The aim is to explore whether two contemporary films differ in their approach to the portrayal of race while adapting *Othello* to the 21st century.

The methodology employed is as follows:

Firstly, I carried out an in-depth investigation of the most important concepts for this analysis, these being race, culture, and race representations within the media. Then, I investigated on the relationship between Shakespeare and race, with a focus on how *Othello* represents race and Otherness. Afterward, I decided what adaptations I was going to analyze. In the beginning, I thought to compare a modern adaptation with a classical one. However, after investigating the numerous adaptations of the play, I decided it would be more revealing to compare two modern adaptations to understand how adaptations could diverge in the representation of race. To continue, I watched the chosen adaptations and analyzed them by applying a self-constructed analytical framework that includes the following contextual, stylistic, and linguistic dimensions:

Table 1. Self-made analytical framework

Dimensions	Elements	Explanation
CONTEXTUAL	Casting	Selection of actors
	Context	Historical and sociocultural context of the adaptation
	Plot	Similitudes and changes with the original play
STYLISTIC	Characterization of Othello	Character's life experiences, motivations, personality and psychological aspects
	Representation tendencies	Reference to the representation tendencies explained in the introduction ("whitewashing", tokenism, blackface...)
	Other cinematographic elements	Analysis of the soundtrack, setting, editing and camera movements.
	Symbolism	Undirect meaning through representations of ideas or qualities
LINGUISTIC	Language	Language style used by the Black characters
	Racial dynamics with other characters and direct references to race	Direct references to the race of the main character

To continue, by applying the matrix above, I will carry out a comparative analysis of both adaptations, examining representations of race in relation to the original *Othello* text. The analysis will be segmented according to each of the criteria mentioned above. Finally,

based on the previous analysis, I will conclude if the position of these movies regarding race, challenge, or not traditional representations of race.

6 ANALYSIS

6.1 Introduction to both adaptations.

The 2001 American film *O* by Tim Blake Nelson is a modern adaptation of *Othello* set in an elite boarding in the South of the United States in the early 21st century. *O* provides a contemporary and provocative rewrite of the classical play and captivates the audience with its emotional depth and lasting relevance. Tim Blake Nelson, an American actor, director, and scriptwriter, appropriates Shakespeare's dramatism but alters its context and some cinematographic elements to adapt it to the cinematic genre and emphasize the theme of race and violence, in America (Sutliff-Benesis, 2011).

This film is part of a tendency that originated in the 1990s of adapting Shakespearean narratives in new settings and periods (Lanier, 2010). The target audience was teenagers, aiming to reach new audiences, especially through an educational perspective. Nelson addresses three different markets: Shakespeare, teen films, and sports. It is part of Hollywood's strategy of globalization to conquer the film industry by putting teenagers into the plots and by using cultural role models (Howard, 2007). As stated by Colleen Etman (2017) "films like *O* or *10 Things I Hate About You* are representative of this push to reach new audiences" (p.19). According to Fedderson and Richardson (2009) the new Shakespeare's "resonated with current anxieties about gender identity, sexual relations, war and death, revenge, mutilation, and social breakdown, etc., mirroring the trend of adapting Shakespeare to fit cultural context (p.13).

The 2001 modern adaptation of *Othello*, bearing the same title as the original play, is a British television film crafted by Andrew Davis and Geoffrey Sax. It is worth mentioning that Davis has become best known for his adaptations of books to television productions, including *Middlemarch* (1994), *Pride and Prejudice* (1995) or *Vanity Fair* (1998) among others (National Portrait Gallery). This adaptation of Shakespeare's play sets the plot in modern Britain, where racial tensions collide with jealousy and revenge within the Metropolitan Police of London, also known as Scotland Yard. Through a contemporary lens, the director and producers focus on the theme of race and violence within the police institution. This adaptation cannot be classified under a "Teen Shakespeare" since it is not intended for that audience. However, it comes from the early 2000s' growing interest among filmmakers in revising classical literature and timeless plays and adapting them to contemporary audiences (Etman, 2017).

These films can be classified into free and modern-day adaptations of Shakespeare's *Othello*, according to the four categories established by Hatchuel (2004), which established four main categories based on traditional classifications of adaptations and the corpus of Shakespeare films;

(1) Adaptations that use the original English text but transform it more or less extensively, (2) free adaptations that use a translation of the text, (3) films whose frameworks are inspired by plots of Shakespeare's plays, Shakespeare's text is either completely absent or only present in a few scenes, (4) Films in which the characters play Shakespeare's roles, direct or teach a Shakespeare play and does not follow the plot of the play (Hatchuel, 2004, pp. 23-25).

These two adaptations can be categorized into category number 3 since *O* and *Othello* use the play's plot as a framework and may or may not include words or phrases from the original text. Additionally, they can be classified as free and modern-day adaptations since both films transfer the play's plot into the 21st century and contemporary England (Sax) and America (Nelson) (Hatchuel, 2004).

6.2 Casting

In the film *O*, the first thing that stands out is the casting of a Black actor in the role of Othello. In this case, Odin James who represents Othello, is interpreted by Mekhi Phifer an American actor, rapper, and producer who was already famous and had done stereotyped Black characters (IMDb, s.f.). It is important to point out, that this is not the first time a Black actor interpreted Othello: In 1807 Frederick Aldridge, an Afro-American actor, was the first person of color to interpret Othello (Gamero, 2020). In addition, Nelson's adaptation features Josh Hartnett (*Pearl Harbor*) and Julia Stiles (*10 Things I hate About You*). The director casts three renowned teenage stars for his film to attract his intended audience, teenagers (Hodgdon, *Race-ing Othello, re-engendering white-out, II*, 2003).

One of the main similarities between the adaptation and the original play is the characters, the director changes the names of the characters to bring them to the modern day but maintains most of the original figures. For example, Odin James is Othello, Desi

Brable is Desdemona, Michael Cassio is Casio, Hugo Goulding is Iago, Roger is Rodrigo, Brandy is Bianca, Dean Brable is Brabantio and Emily is Emilia. As we can see, Nelson even tried to make the names resemble the original ones. Moreover, they maintained the name of The Duke as the nickname of his character in the film, Coach Goulding. By maintaining the same composition of characters, the director honors the original play and uses it as a foundation to explore contemporary themes preserving the dynamics and tension between the cast. Moreover, regarding the casting of the film, the cast has a strong connection with the original play, Desdemona remains a white and blonde innocent girl, Iago is the jealous and manipulative villain, and the Duke is the protective leader.

The English adaptation of *Othello* also casts a Black actor in the role of Othello. The officer John Othello is interpreted by Eamonn Walker, an English actor with Caribbean ascendancy. He was already known for his role as Kareem Said in the HBO television series “OZ”, which aired from 1997 to 2003. His role was a stereotyped representation of Black people associated with prison drama, gang activity, and conflict with authority figures.

This adaptation of *Othello* tries to maintain most of the characters of the original play. The director subtly changes their name to ensure recognition from the audience. For example, officer John Othello is Othello, Officer Ben Jago is Iago, Officer Michel Cass is Michel Cassio, Officer Alan Roderick is Rodrigo, and Dessie Brabant is Desdemona. However, other characters that portray one of the original characters but do not keep the same name, an example is Lulu, Dessie’s best friend, who portrays Emilia or Commissioner Sinclair Carver who represents the Duke of Venice. Even if the principal characters are represented, the film cuts out the roles of Bianca, Cassio’s romantic interest, or Brabantio, Desdemona’s father.

6.3 Context

In *O*, the film is set in the year 2000 in Charleston, South Carolina in Palmetto Grove Academy elite boarding school where mainly white students attend. This context is not randomly chosen by the director and scriptwriters: The city of Charleston was one of the most significant in the civil rights movement that fought for the rights of the Black population in the United States during the 1960s. Therefore, the racial segregation, violence, and white supremacy present in Charleston since the period of enslavement

make it the perfect setting for this film. *O* extendedly deals with the prevalence of racist tendencies after the signing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 prohibiting discrimination based on race, sex, color, or religion (Joiner, 2015). This is exemplified in the treatment received by Odin (Othello): Not only is he the only Black student, but he has been brought to the school - unlike his peers - because of his talent as a basketball player. Throughout the film, he faces oppression and hostility due to his racial origin, which contributes to his tragic ending. A clear example is when Hugo's father, Coach Goulding says, "O is different than us, he's the only Black student in the whole school" (Nelson, 2001). This clearly separates Odin from the rest of his white peers (Central values in "O" and "Othello", s.f.). Similarly, the only other Black character is a drug dealer who meets with Hugo and Odin to provide them with drugs, giving a representation of the stock portrayal of Black people within society. This differentiation places Odin as the Black less privileged Other in a school where the Self are white rich students.

In *Othello* (2001), the film transfers the play's plot into the 21st century in contemporary London, England. To be more specific, it is set within the Metropolitan Police forces in London, a setting chosen by Sax to highlight gender, racial, and racist issues in Britain's police forces. As in *O*, the context is not randomly chosen, the adaptation is closely linked with the events taking place in England when the film was released. The adaptation cannot be viewed without considering the 1993 criminal case of Stephen Lawrence, a black teenager who was murdered by racists in London. Initially, none of the five suspected white men were convicted. Seven years later, the corresponding civil case ended with no convictions. Almost two decades later, in 2012, Dobson and Norris, two of the original suspects, were finally convicted of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment. The effect of these events on the film was confirmed by Andrew Davis in an interview when answering if the racial issues of the film are especially topical in Britain. Davies stated that the Stephen Lawrence case inspired him to make John Othello the commissioner of the London Metropolitan Police. Moreover, the debut of *Othello* on TV was combined with the screening of the ITV documentary *The Murder of Stephen Lawrence* by PBS in the same month (Hodgdon, Race-ing Othello, re-engendering white-out, II, 2003). To illustrate the racial tensions in Britain, the film portrays the sole Black police officer as an outsider, emphasizing the hostility and oppression he encounters within the police force because of his background and race.

6.4 Plot

In *O*, the “hero that falls into disgrace” structure of *Othello* is maintained. In the first scene, Odin is presented as the most popular kid in school, the star of the basketball team, and dating the most popular girl. However, throughout the film, fueled by the manipulation of Hugo we can see how the expected behavior and personality of a stereotyped Black person emerges. He becomes violent, deals, and uses drugs with another Black peer, and ends up shooting himself. Therefore, as Othello, Odin goes from an esteemed position, which would not be expected from someone of his color, to the stereotyped position the audience is most comfortable with. As Hunter (1978) argues, Iago (Hugo) reduces the “white” reality of Othello to the “Black appearance of his face” and this is maintained in *O* (p.31).

In *Othello* (2001), we can appreciate more changes in the plot than in *O*, they aim to reinforce that the objective of the film is to tackle racism and for the ease of the plot. Despite that, the character of John Othello follows the same fate as Odin in *O*. At the beginning of the film, he quells the most recent riot after the murder of a Black person by police forces, he calls for “justice under the law”. Then, he is propelled into the position of police commissioner after the dismissal of the previous white commissioner, who was recorded making racist comments about the new official policy to diversify the police force. Afterward, the white officer next in line is consumed with jealousy and plots his revenge by convincing the new officer that his wife is cheating on him. In the end, John becomes violent and lunatic, killing his wife and finally shooting himself (Johnstone, 2022).

However, there is a difference between the plot in the original play and in this adaptation. At the beginning of the film, Sax modifies the initial sequence to foreground racism as the underlying theme. He interpolates images of Billy Coates being killed by policemen with an elegant banquet of the police forces. In addition, the angry gazes of white officers towards John Othello after the commissioner proposes his new diversity policy of promoting Black and Asian officers proves that racism within the institutions is going to be explored. In the original play, the main conflict introduced at the beginning is the concerns of Iago and Rodrigo about Desdemona’s and Othello’s marriage, when they “call up” Brabantio (Mayr, 2017). Moreover, Hodgeon (2003) argues that “in this movie, it is not John Othello who introduces racism, like in Shakespeare’s play, but rather

Billy Coates” (p.89). John is the one who reacts to it by promising justice. By creating a new narrative in the movie, parallel to Iago’s revenge, it shows the intention to differ from the original play and include further racial considerations. In addition, the tragic end is also changed, Sax decides not to kill Lulu, Emilia in Shakespeare’s play. Similarly, in *Othello*, Iago is judged by the authorities, but in this movie, Ben Jago is named the new commissioner. The decision to not kill Lulu and to not punish Jago for his manipulative game goes hand in hand with the message of Sax’s adaptation: Racism can take place everywhere, even in high and respected institutions. It hides and waits to break free as Jago does (Mayr, 2017).

Moreover, there is another difference, in *Othello* (2001) the film narrates in the background a case of police brutality fueled by racism, the murder of Billy Coates, a Black person killed by four policemen who were searching his house for alleged possession of drugs. This narrative is given the same importance as Jago’s revenge plot, highlighting that in this adaptation what matters is not only the tragic spiral of the main character but also exploring racism and police brutality against people of color.

In addition, there are changes in the character’s plot. For example, in Shakespeare’s *Othello*, Rodrigo is the one in love with Desdemona, and in Sax’s *Othello* it is Michel Cass (Cassio). Likewise, Ben Jago is directly jealous of John Othello due to his new commissioner position, but in *Othello*, he is jealous of Cassio becoming Othello’s lieutenant.

6.5 Characterization of Othello

Characterization is the process of using different narrative elements to define a character's personality, through his life experiences, motivations, and psychological aspects (Hellerman, 2024). In Shakespeare’s *Othello* the main character is a respected and celebrated soldier. He is depicted as a noble and virtuous “moor”. In this adaptation Nelson translates the characterization into the 21st century, making Odin an equally respectable figure, a basketball star esteemed by his peers. Both Othello and Odin are celebrated for their “heroic” deeds and are superior to the character of Iago, Hugo in *O*. Similarly, it could be argued that Odin is a “warrior” on the basketball court. The respected and esteemed personality within the elite boarding school is clearly shown at the beginning when Odin received the MVP award from Coach Goulding. This scene can be equated to the one in *Othello* where the senators narrate Othello’s deed as they decide to send him to fight to Cyprus.

Odin also has a common trait with the original Othello, which is the tragic flaw of jealousy. This flaw is explored by Iago, Hugo in *O*, who manipulates Othello into believing that Desdemona is cheating on him. Moreover, Othello's jealousy is fueled by his own insecurities with his marriage and position white a dominant white society. His Blackness is not only a symbol of his alienation but also one of his greatest insecurities which eventually results in his downfall (Mayr, 2017).

In *Othello* (2001), like in *O*, there is also a parallel between the original figure of Othello and its representation in the contemporary context in which the film is set. John Othello is a respectable and noble figure within his society, he is part of the police forces which are normally one of the most respected institutions within a country. He oversees protecting the citizens of London, the same duty as Othello in Shakespeare's play: protecting the people of Venice from the Turks. This characterization of John Othello is clearly stated in the film at the beginning when he ends the riot with a promise of "justice under the law" (Mayr, 2017).

The trait of jealousy of Othello's character is also present in the characterization of John Othello and in Iago, in this case officer Ben Jago, takes advantage of it. He manipulates John into believing that his wife Dessie is cheating on him with her bodyguard, officer Michel Cass. To do so, he takes advantage of his insecurities regarding his marriage and his position, which are fueled by his skin color. An example is when John Othello is chosen as commissioner and he asks: "Prime Minister, is all of this about making a statement?" He can't believe that he is being chosen only for his capacity as a police officer. However, his suspicions are confirmed at the end, making his insecurity justifiable. The Prime Minister after the tragic ending says: "It was a great experiment, wasn't it? Next time it will be better to play it safe." (Sax, 2001).

6.6 Representation tendencies (whitewashing, tokenism, blackface...)

In *O* the first thing that stands out is the casting of a black actor in the role of Othello. In this case, Odin James who represents Othello, is interpreted by Mekhi Phifer, an American actor, rapper, and producer. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that in the casting process, two tendencies are not present, these are Blackface and Whitewashing. These two tendencies were common in Shakespeare's cinematic adaptations of Othello, for example, in the 1951 adaptation by Orson Welles, he played

the main character with his face painted black. However, Otherness is still explored through the main character, since Odin is a talented black athlete in a predominantly white environment that suffers from prejudices and scrutiny throughout the film.

Nevertheless, we can see tokenism in the casting since there are only two African American actors, Mekhi Phifer (Odin James) and Anthony Johnson (Dell/drug dealer). This practice is used to give the impression of being inclusive, but both characters are used to perpetuate a stereotype of how people of color should act from the lens of white imagination. This is evident in *O*, these two actors are the reflection of some of the most proliferated stereotypes of the Black community, one is the essentialist relationship between Black men and basketball and the rhetoric of Black people as obsessive drug users or drug dealers.

We should point out that stereotypes flood the representation of the Black community in the film. The first one is the representation of Odin as the star of the basketball team, reinforcing the stereotype of Black people as excellent athletes and basketball players. By doing so we are simplifying individuals to one-dimensional caricatures. In addition, Nelson highlights Odin's physical skills in sports just like Othello's abilities in the military. On the other hand, the other Black character is a drug dealer, who represents the stereotype of Black people as felons, abusive drug users and criminals. To continue, at the beginning of the film during a party where Odin is with his white girlfriend, Desi, Hugo, and Roger come up with a plot to expel Odin and accuse him of forcing himself on Desi. According to Kyle Gaydo (2021) "this reflects the stereotype of the "Black buck", a historical term identifying Black men as sexually rapacious and vicious to the point of becoming menaces to white women and committing rape" (p.8-9). It is important to point out that this happens even before Hugo instigates jealousy in Odin, suggesting that Black men inherently tend to violent behaviors. Then, when Odin rapes Desi, he finally falls into his expected caricature of being a predator to the white. In the aftermath of this incident, Odin falls back into taking drugs, marking the turning point in the film, since Odin is no longer above his peers but has become what was imposed on him in the beginning. Then he says to Hugo "You really fucked me up..." (Nelson, 2001) and pins him against a wall, again reinforcing the image of Odin as a brute. Odin's volatility against white hegemony is represented through the intersection of language and violence. Then he channels that rage into physical display, and, surrounded by a white audience he breaks the hoop in the basketball court. This is the fulfillment of the stereotype of the physical dominance of Black men that could turn against society

through criminality. It uses the basketball court as a site where a white audience can enjoy the brutality of the Black men. The final scene is also full of stereotypes, since it is the culmination of the fall of the hero into the expected position he should hold within society. Odin chokes Desi to death and ends up killing himself after a confrontation with the character of Hugo (Gaydo, 2021). In his final words, Odin depicts the traditional stereotyping of the Afro American community and its marginalization, he says “I ain’t no different than none of y’all. My mom’s ain’t no crack head. I wasn’t no gangbanger. It wasn’t some hood rat drug dealer that tripped me up. It was this white, prep-school motherfucker standing right there” (Nelson, 2001). In conclusion, the movie perpetuates stereotypes that are used to create the position of the Other in contrast to the Self throughout the film.

In the 2001 adaptation of *Othello*, neither blackface nor whitewashing is depicted, but Otherness is also explored through the character of John Othello, the only Black officer in Scotland Yard, known for his nobility and integrity. In this adaptation there is also a representation of the Black community, the Black ‘hood where Billy Coates is murdered, that is put in juxtaposition with the police corps. The film explores the marginalization not only of the individual Black character, but the Black community.

However, we can see tokenism since there is only one Black actor in the leading cast, Eamonn Walker as John Othello. The other significant Black role in the film is Billy Coates, played by Morgan Johnson, but his character is killed in the first five minutes of the film. Nonetheless, his death is a central theme of the film, the event that permits the scriptwriters to explore police brutality against the Black community. The other Black characters in the film are secondary characters that make up the Black community where Coates and Othello used to live. This tendency is used to create two figures of the Other, one as the only Black officer within police forces, and another as the Black community within a mainly white society. Then, the figure of Billy Coates is used as the token that catalyzes the narrative criticizing racism in the film.

As in *O*, the representations of Blackness in the film are deeply stereotyped. The first one is the stereotype of Black men as abusive drug users and criminals. Upon entering Billy Coates' house, the police officers search for drugs but come up empty-handed, causing the stereotype to collapse. Then, the Black and immigrant neighbors start a riot where they burn cars, throw objects and the police and cause damage. There is another stereotype, that portrays Black people as inherently violent. Then John comes out

to calm the masses: in his speech, he says: “The world is watching us tonight. Is that the way you want the world to see us. Ruining our shops, burning our cars, trashing our own community? What do you think the world will call us then? Ignorant fools.” (Sax, 2001) With this statement, he portrays the typical stereotyped image of marginalized communities as violent and tears it down by insisting on acting differently and showing the world they do not fit into that stereotype. However, even if John Othello tries to avoid violence and fights this stereotype, at the end of the film he falls into it. When John suspects that Dessie is cheating on him, he becomes aggressive with her and starts destroying everything in the house to find evidence of the affair. Also, he becomes verbally abusive to Dessie, and he says that she married him because her family wanted to get rid of her: “She is a problem girl. We're going to foist her on that nigger because no one else is going to want her.” (Sax, 2001). Then, in the final scene this stereotype is held up again, Othello comes home and violently murders his wife. Like Odin in *O*, the hero falls in disgrace and returns to his expected position within society.

Colonial narratives, which are the narratives put forward by colonizers about colonized people, are also present in this adaptation. However, they are present in a contradictory way: the Black character brings them into the narrative to criticize and question them. In the restaurant scene, when Dessie says that Santa Lucia, Othello’s place of origin, is a magnificent place close to the ocean, Othello answers: “Blacks waiting on whites, just like they did in the old days in the plantations”. Then, everyone at the table is clearly uncomfortable. He continues: “Your people brought my people, over there to work and die slaves on your plantations. It is supposed to be different now, right? My people came over here to start a new live and what do they get? The leftovers.” (Sax, 2001). Here we can see that the distinction between the Self and the Other is a historical binary that has been perpetuated until modern days. By introducing this discourse, the scriptwriters put modern hierarchies of race in the context of the historical oppression of the Black community. Furthermore, they directly present reality to the audience, an audience that sees their reflection in the other white characters clearly uncomfortable with Othello’s tale.

6.7 Other cinematographic elements (soundtrack, setting, editing and camera movements)

Regarding the **settings**, in *O* they are used to reinforce the position of the Self (white privileged students) and the Other (poorer Black student). The film features two primary settings, with the most prominent being an elite boarding school. This setting portrays wealth, privilege, and abundant opportunities, mirroring the opulence of Venice in the original play. Meanwhile, the other setting is a struggling, darker, less affluent area where Black people reside. By using only two settings, scriptwriters emphasize their differences and give the sense of isolation that is characteristic in *Othello*. Additionally, there is a parallelism with the original play in the election of the settings, according to Virginia Mason Vaughan (1994) Venice was considered “the epitome of a rationally ordered and prosperous republic” (p.15-16), this can be equalized to the boarding school in the film. In the original work, the other setting is Cyprus, considered Othello’s safe space, an eastern Mediterranean island over which he has control, until the war with the Cypriots begins. In *O*, the basketball court represents the island, and as in *Othello*, this location that was firstly controlled by the main character, is filled with violence, and proves unstable. Therefore, the basketball court provides a comfortable venue for the performance of Black male violence (Sutliff-Benesis, 2011).

In *Othello* (2001), the setting at the beginning is established by the characters and their costumes as well as words rather than the location itself. Sax does not overemphasize the spatial setting in his adaptation, to allow viewers from other countries to establish a connection between what is seen on screen and their own experiences with racism (Mayr, 2017). We can also see similitudes between the set design in the film and the original play of Othello. In Shakespeare's play, the storyline unfolds in Venice, renowned for its network of canals. Although not as renowned for its waterways, London also has notable ones, like the Regent's Canal, which traverses various parts of the city. In the film, John Othello’s, and Dessie’s apartment is in a building facing one of London’s canals. Some of the scenes take place in that canal as an allusion to Shakespeare’s play.

Then, like in *O*, the set design helps create the binomial between the Self and the Other. At the beginning, the elegant banquet of the police is put in juxtaposition with the hood where the killing of Billy Coates and the subsequent riots take place. The ‘hood, is the Other, usually attributed to Black, immigrant, poorer communities. The elegant and ostentatious banquet filled with white police officers is the Self. By placing Othello within the second setting, he is an individual of the Other who is an intruder within the space of the Self. This is clearly shown when he is chosen to talk to the masses protesting in front of the police quarters and when he goes outside and says: “Brothers and sisters, you know

who I am. I was born here; I grew up in these streets” (Sax, 2001). Then, throughout the film the settings vary, but we can make a distinction between police related settings, and Othello’s house. They represent the two narratives in the film, one related to racism within police institutions and the investigation of Billy Coates’ murder, and the other where Jago’s revenge plot takes place.

The **soundtrack** in *O* is used in the othering process of Odin’s character. Most of the music chosen for the film is rap music by Black authors, a genre mostly attributed to the Black community due to its historical roots and the majoritarian representation of Black rappers. Moreover, rap music has been one of the main platforms for addressing social and political issues affecting the Black community, including racism, poverty, police brutality, and systemic injustice. An example is the use of the song “Astronomy” by Black Star during the scene of the Hawks basketball match, this song includes lyrics such as “Black like the slave ship that later brought us here” or “Black people unite and let's all get down” that show the fight of the Black community against a racist society. Likewise, Nelson employs the popular song Outkast in the background to highlight Odin’s Otherness. Outkast explores the representation of Black humanity and Otherness through the similes and connotations of the lyrics. For instance, the lyrics say “Black like the misfit hawk” alluding to the symbolic inferior bird that is outcast from the pure white doves due to its color and ability. This is a symbol that is widely explored in the film. The use of this soundtrack is another tool used by the scriptwriters to deal with racial injustices but at the same time to reinforce the Black rapper stereotype. Moreover, when the image of the black Hawk appears the music used is rap music, but with the white doves at the beginning a sung version of “Ave María” is placed in the background. Both songs are associated with different social classes and races, reinforcing the binarity of the Self and the Other.

Regarding the soundtrack in *Othello* (2001), it is not used as in *O* to perpetuate stereotypes of the Black Other. In this adaptation the music used is mainly instrumental music and opera, it is used to create a dramatic aura and as a wink to the original Othello.

Finally, **camera movement**, a filmmaking technique that describes the motion of the camera to enrich a narrative, is used to reinforce the binomial between the Other and the Self. In *O*, Nelson’s way of editing, for example, creates additional meaning when shots of Odin are juxtaposed with images of a black hawk, and Hugo’s or Desi’s shots

are juxtaposed with the white doves. In *Othello*, Sax's usage of soliloquies is underlined. It is used to give dramatic irony, but also, to point out that the white character oversees telling the story of the Black character, the Self gives voice to the story of the Other. In addition, the camera movement is used to create meaning. The spinning of the camera in the last scenes, when *Othello* is crazy with jealousy, refers to their mental state and confusion. This reinforces the idea of the Black Other as violent and mentally unstable.

6.8 Symbolism

Symbolism is the use of symbols to represent ideas or qualities, conveying meaning beyond the literal interpretation (MasterClass, 2021). In *O* there is a clever use of symbolism throughout the film that emphasizes the structure of the Other and the Self within the narrative. The visual symbolism of pure white doves cooing and huddling together emphasizes on the fact that the school is predominantly white: however, this is replaced with a scene of an individual caged black hawk and immediately cuts to a shot of Odin highlighting that he doesn't belong, he is the Other. The hawk represents Odin, its actions and skills are strong and desirable, yet the black hawk is caged and outcasted by the white doves. Moreover, doves are usually associated with peace and innocence, while the hawk is associated with aggression and predatory instinct. This symbolism is a way of reinforcing the Otherness in Odin by using the animals as a parallel to his relationship with Desi and the rest of the white students in the school. To do so, the hawks and doves are a central theme in the film, which begins with the image of doves and Hugo saying in a voiceover "All my life, I always wanted to fly. I always wanted to live like a hawk. I know you're not supposed to be jealous of anything, but to take flight, to soar over everything and everyone—now that's living" (Nelson T. B., 2001). Likewise, the film ends with Hugo leaving the scene of the massacre and again saying in a voiceover "All my life I always wanted to fly. I always wanted to live like a hawk. ... Odin is a hawk. He soars above us. He can fly. One of these days, everyone's gonna pay attention to me—because I'm gonna fly, too" (Nelson T. B., 2001). According to Gaydo (2021) "staying faithful to the source material, Nelson reorients the focus of the tragedy away from Odin to returning to the white hegemony and ending with whiteness" (p.10). Moreover, the parallelism between Odin and a hawk is also associated with freedom from the oppression of social structures and white hegemony.

Similarly, the elite boarding school symbolizes privilege, elitism, and conformity. It represents society's power structure where Black men must have outstanding capacities to be accepted. In contrast, the neglected Black neighborhood symbolizes poverty, oppression, and systemic injustice (Gaydo, 2021). This symbol reinforces the figure of Odin as an Other who is an intruder, and as soon he falls into his expected caricature, he is outcasted.

In *Othello* (2001) no symbolism emphasizes the structure of the Self and the Other. The only symbol in this film is the golden silk dressing gown, that substitutes the handkerchief in the original play. John sees Cass wearing the gown, the proof that he needs to start believing Jago's suspicions of Dessie's affair. According to Barbara Hodgdon, "the gown is a symbol of John's and Dessie's sexual relationship because he wears the gown before they have and after they shared intimate moments together" (p.94). This symbol is related to the narrative regarding jealousy and revenge, it has nothing to do with race.

6.9 Language

In both adaptations the main protagonists, who are Black, present an accent and language characteristic of Black communities in their respective countries, the United States and the United Kingdom. In the case of Odin, he uses African American Vernacular English (AAVE), which is an English variety commonly spoken by African Americans in the United States. This variety presents different phonological, morphological, and lexical properties. Is characterized by the use of double negatives for emphasis, the deletion of final consonants, and the employment of innovative vocabulary such as "fleek", "bling" or "slay" (Mendia, 2022). As for John Othello, he originates from the island of Santa Lucia, in the Caribbean, and the accent and language that he uses is influenced by this origin. He uses what is known as Black British English, also described by some as "Multicultural London English", the dialect of the immigrants and descendants of African and Caribbean communities. Is characterized by the use of non-standard grammar with the absence of the third person singular in verbs, phonologically it includes th-fronting which is when "th" sounds are pronounced as "f" or "v" and uses vocabulary from Caribbean languages such as "bashment", "wagwan" or "gyal" (Purdy-Moore & Thompson, 2021).

6.10 Racial dynamics with other character and direct references to race

In the classical play of *Othello*, there are many direct references to the race of the main character. The other characters use derogatory references to Othello's race to strengthen the Otherness of this character. For example, when Iago refers to Othello and Desdemona's relationship by saying "Even now, very now, an old **black** ram / Is tugging your **white** ewe." (Shakespeare, 1984). The same tendency is maintained in both adaptations analyzed.

In *O*, the vocabulary is adapted to the context of the film. Like the "moor", the derogative term "nigger" is used to depreciate Odin's humanity and ego as it has negative and racist connotations. As Desi and Odin discuss the ramifications of the term, Desi comments that her people invented the word, emphasizing that "nigger" is a racist term, developed by white people to describe an external and different figure. However, there is a slight difference between the original play and *O*, which is that issues concerning Odin's race are put in a rhetorical question, to make a point about the considerations of race within society. For instance, in a scene where Emilia questions Desi "did he rape you," Desi responds with a rhetorical question that highlights Emilia's perception of Odin as sexually promiscuous. Desi's retort, "Would you have said that if he was white?" underscores Emilia's racial bias. This shows that Blackness is a sign of impurity, in contrast to Whiteness. Therefore, race tendencies are put into question here, an ethical consideration that is nowhere to be seen in the other adaptations or in the original play.

In *Othello* (2001), there are also multiple derogatory allusions to John's race; by doing so the scriptwriters use language as the primary way of reinforcing his position as the Other within Scotland Yard. For example, Jago jokingly calls John a "clever black bastard" and shortly afterward uses the derogatory and racist expressions "ape" and "nigger" to refer to John. References to John Othello's race are exaggerated and mostly come from the most overtly racist character, Ben Jago, a character hated by the audience from the beginning. In this manner, the scriptwriters condemn racist behaviors, associating them with the unethical and malevolent figure, thus prompting the audience to correlate such actions with negative character attributes. Similarly, some racist

comments are so extreme that they seem unbelievable. A strategy used is to put racist attitudes in society in front of the audience, which, even if they may appear exaggerated, are real. For example, Ben Jago disguises his racism in seemingly joking comments, such as “your clever black bastard”. Jago’s dishonesty shows how society and the government pretend to be racially tolerant just to be politically correct.

Moreover, when discussing racism in Sax’s *Othello*, we must consider Jago’s first and final voice-over: “It was about love, that’s what you got to understand. Don’t talk to me about race. Don’t talk to me about politics. It was love. Simple as that” (Sax, 2001). Jago tries to explain that the revenge plan and the actions that follow are not fueled by race, but throughout the film, we see multiple references and behaviors that show that it is about racism. This is shown by characterizing Jago as a racist from the beginning. For example, in the bathroom scene when the commissioner says the racist declarations that are later taped and published, a white man comes out of the bathroom and Ben Jago says: “At least he is one of ours”. Here we can see the distinction between the Self (white officers) and the Other (John Othello, a black officer). Then, when Othello is chosen as commissioner, Jago explodes with envy in a monologue full of racist comments. He says, “patronizing ape” referring to Othello and that Othello is “just a token” because he is a “nigga”. Clearly, it is about race, and Sax wants to criticize how society tries to argue that racist behaviors are not founded on race.

Likewise, in the bed scene between Dessie and John Othello, images are juxtaposed with Ben Jago writing in a Nazi blog making racist comments such as “what it is like having a jungle bunny as commissioner” and calling Othello’s wife a “white tart”. Even if Jago says that “it was about love” what is most important about John Othello is his skin color, not only within the police forces but also in his relationship to his wife.

However, the most important references to race are the ones regarding the killing of Billy Coates. This new narrative that Sax includes is focused on criticizing hierarchies of race within society. For example, while the police are committing the murder, the commissioner says in his speech that the police must deal with “criminals of every race, creed, and color, so that honorable people can live” (Sax, 2001). By saying this while an unlawful murder of a person of color is committed it sets an ironic contrast, that aims to criticize racism. In addition, while killing him the officials say, “kill the Black man”, stating that the crime is fueled by racism. Additionally, Ben Jago says when talking about this murder: “shame in a way all this, four young careers lost for an asshole like Billy Coates” (Sax, 2001). For him, even if those young “promising” officers have killed

someone, when that someone is Black it loses seriousness. This reinforces the racist trait in Jago's character and racism within police forces.

7 CONCLUSION

After examining two modern versions of Shakespeare's *Othello*, it's evident that the themes of Otherness and racism endure in today's media. Instead of challenging these narratives, these adaptations often exploit and perpetuate them. While there are some signs of progress, particularly in certain aspects, there's still much room for improvement in how race is portrayed. This analysis highlights the ongoing need for critical reflection and advancement in representing race in media.

O and *Othello* are a clear example of how representations of race have evolved in modern adaptations of Shakespeare. Both films are modernized adaptations of the classical play that push the boundaries in comparison to previous ones. This can be seen in the avoidance of using Blackface or Whitewashing in the casting process. Previous adaptations did not only maintain the Othered figure of the main characters but eradicated any presence of Black people in the casting. However, many of the typical stereotypes of Blackness are maintained, putting in jeopardy the capacity of these adaptations to challenge inaccurate representations of race in the media. In the case of *O*, it does not directly challenge representations of race. It presents an over-stereotyped representation of the Black community that complies with previous racial representations, ultimately leading the protagonist to his expected position within society. On the other hand, it is important to point out that producers and scriptwriters have used modern adaptations to explore themes of race and racism more explicitly. They may draw parallels between Shakespeare's narratives and contemporary racial issues, highlighting the continued relevance of these themes. A clear example are these adaptations, *Othello* (2001) focuses on another dimension of racial issues nowadays, which is racism within the security forces and *O* explores racism among adolescences in 21st-century America.

Regarding the extent to which contemporary adaptations of Shakespeare perpetuate the silencing and stereotyping of those racialized as Others in media or are they modified to challenge racial power structures and hierarchies in present-day society. We can conclude from the previous analysis that one of the adaptations does challenge racial hierarchies, but the other falls into the same racial dynamics than the original play and previous adaptations. *O* by Tim Blake Nelson upholds the same legacy *Othello* started six centuries ago, it projects whiteness as a hegemonic force that remains above

Blackness. The film ultimately reinforces harmful American stereotypes about Black men, overshadowing the film's efforts at positive portrayal. On the contrary, *Othello* (2001) by Geoffrey Sax has been celebrated for its depiction of race tendencies within the institutional framework. The film reminds us to fight for meaningful structural changes in our institutions as well as our security apparatus by portraying this type of racism. In addition, it includes other perspectives on the question of race, such as exploring explanations for the final behaviors of the character, as John Othello's paranoia is positioned within the context of generational trauma stemming from the slave trade. This shows that Othello's rage runs deeper than jealous sentiments or the violent nature attributed to Black people. It is important to point out that this adaptation does not change the ending, the Black character kills himself in an outburst of fury and jealousy. However, a new meaning is created by not punishing Ben Jago, not finding justice for Billy Coates, and the last words of the Prime Minister ("It was a great experiment, wasn't it? Next time it will be better to play it safe"). The original situation has not changed since racism and racist tendencies will continue. Sax stresses with this ending that racism surrounds modern societies, and that racism is not fully opposable. Sax tries to challenge traditional representations of race, not by changing the stereotyped portrayal of the Black main character, but by identifying the multiple oppressing forces within society that lead them to that position.

Finally, how do these adaptations represent the ideas put forward by the Cultural Critical Approach, which states that ideas of race can be contested as they are constantly being made and remade? Both adaptations are clear examples of how race is constructed and reconstructed influenced by the cultural contexts in which they are produced. In these adaptations, race is not static but rather dynamic, shaped by societal norms, prejudices, and power dynamics. The original play presented a representation of race influenced by the cultural and societal context of the Elizabethan period. Othello is a black moor, presented as a villain and bestial and at the same time aristocratic and exotic. A man of color in a powerful position as leader of the army, falls into his expected position as a brute. Then, in *O*, the same representation of race is translated into a Black basketball player in an elite school, that ends up falling into violence and drugs. Likewise, in *Othello* (2001), the representation of race is one more time changed to fit the context in which the plot unfolds, the same character of the Other is translated into a Scotland Yard Official, renowned for his actions within the police forces. He ends up killing his wife out of

jealousy. However, even if these representations of race are different, we have seen that they embody the same stereotypes and are built into the figure of the Other. Even if that figure seems different, the truth is that it is the same representation of race but with different appearances. The only film that tries to shape that representation of Blackness into another path is *Othello* (2001), which includes a stereotyped representation of the Other and criticizes it as an attempt to make the audience realize that they have been encountering for centuries.

We can conclude that race representations have evolved, but many maintain the same racialized portrayal of the Black Community. Media has just reinvented the same stereotypes into modern contexts, to please modern audiences and make them encounter the same misleading representations of the racialized Other. If we get rid of the modern context and the contemporary racial issues, we end up with the same representation of race as in the original play. But efforts being made, and some adaptations of literary classics do take a different standpoint towards race. Making us believe that there is still hope for reaching a more authentic and inclusive portrayal of race in media.

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