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Racism in Othello

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Racism has been one of the most devastating matters of the human being from the very beginning of the history, and it has been a topic of great debate and discussion since then. This severe fact does not have a special time and place. Actually, every society that has inhabited the earth has been virtually affected by this dispensable problem, racism. As all the important affairs of human being, the issue of the race is also one of the most significant themes that have a huge place in world- wide literature. Generally, most of the eras in the literature world have got their share of pleasure from this subject but Elizabethan Era was one of the most obvious times and Elizabethan Society was one of the most obvious places that discrimination of race was felt. The fascinating play of Shakespeare, Othello, is one of the plays that are shaped by the flaming effects of Racism. The unavoidable and destructive effects of racism on people's lives and how a society that has the prejudice of racism can restrain love and what can be the limitation of the racist people at destroying the people's happiness are constructing the main purpose and progress of this research. It is to touch on the bad development of a character that has the bad feeling of racism and shaping his life according to it even dedicating himself to working under the devastating power of the racism.

Keywords: Racism, Othello, Blackness, Iago.

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Introduction

The race is one of the important features that affect people's lives. More than affecting, the race can even lead and shape the fates because of the reality that the acceptance of this race to a different society can be difficult, and as it has been one of the biggest problems of human being from the very beginning of history, there have been insolvable problems in the societies especially in which people from different races living together. In his article, Howard states that from the beginning of the classical theoretical statements and formalization of it, race has always been a considerable sociological subject hitherto (2000: 169). Humans have been defeated by the immodesty of exalting their races and make the mistake of tyrannizing over other races. As a result of not accepting and looking down on other races, racism has already taken place in societies. Miles and Brown assert that racism deflects mankind and interpersonal connections, barbarizes and depersonalizes its object, as a result of this barbarizes and depersonalizes people who pronounce this expression as well. Racism is a rejection of mankind (supplanting, as it does, 'races for 'the human race') and a means of legalizing diversity (peculiarly a distinct diversity in social status). Whence, it is a big issue and a threat to the community in which it is pronounced and the community which favor ostracizing exercises (2003:10-11). Racism was a reality of Elizabethan Era and society. As the percentage of going out the country and seeing different races and kind of people was very rare during this period, a very big part of England's population could not understand different races and communities and had the result that "blacks -were- monsters, strange creatures from outside the boundaries of the world" (Aubrey, 1999: 76)

Othello is among literary works that racism constitutes their origin. Robeson states: "*Othello* is a tragedy of racial conflict, a tragedy of honor, rather than jealousy (qtd. in Andreas, 39)". Racial prejudice is a poisonous fruit of racism, and it turns the lives into hell. *Othello* can be shown as one of the deplorable representative of racial prejudice. In *Othello*, the protagonist, Othello is a successful soldier. Although he is a Moor, he dedicates himself to serve to society's goals. Unless he serves to his so-called country, he is the most hardworking man and respected soldier in the army. However, when it comes to marriage, the prejudice of his race puts up a wall in front of the eyes of others. The thought of discrimination and racial prejudice cannot or should not always have to display itself as torturing or chafing physically the one that is different or being alienated. Language may possess a cruel function and serve the ones who are in want of emphasizing otherness and insulting the other mercilessly. Derrida states, "There's no racism without a language." The thing here is not that actions of racial violence comprise just words; however, rather than this they must have a word. Although it gives the apology of 'blood, color, birth' or rather it makes use of 'naturalist and sometimes creationist discourse' racism constantly unclot the corruption of a man, the

“talking animal”. It does not ascertain; it ‘discriminates’ (1985: 39). He (1985: 41) adds that from the very beginning of the *Othello*, ‘traditional racist sentiment and prejudice’ infuse the language and break out as an anticipated ‘violence’ at the end of the play when “Chaos is come again” (III.iii.92).

The play, *Othello*, has a harmony of racism. This harmony is provided by the tireless verbalization of “otherness” in the words of “Moor” and “Black”. At the very beginning of the *Othello*, instead of the name of the protagonist Othello, the words of “thick-lips” (I.i.66), and “an old black ram” are articulated (I.i.87). It is surprising that before the name, comes the bad definitions made by the people who are at Othello’s service. Adler emphasizes that in the first scene prior to the meeting of the audience with Othello, several insulting attributions are made, “the stereotyped lasciviousness” is emphasized by various brutal bindings and the race’s black and devil’s black are incorporated (1974: 250- 251). The first articulation begins with Iago, Othello’s malignant ‘ancient’ ensign. He voices his thoughts with the following verses: “Now, sir, be judge yourself/Whether I in any just term am affined/To love the Moor.” (I.i.37-39). His utterances continue until the end of the play. Likewise, the other characters give voice to the otherness of Othello: Desdemona’s father Brabantio, Roderigo- a Venetian gentleman, Duke of Venice, Gratiano- Desdemona’s uncle, Lodovico- Desdemona’s cousin, Cassio, Emilia and finally Montano- the governor of Cyprus. Except for “Moor” and “Black” there are other attributions like “an old black ram” (I.i.87); “ ... the sooty bosom of such a thing as thou – to fear, not to delight” (I.ii.70); “... what delight shall she have to look on the devil” (II.i.220-221); “O murderous coxcomb”(V.ii.234). Adler (1974: 250- 251) asserts that the devil’s blackness and Othello’s blackness, the abnormal integration of ‘evil with good and of African with European’ are equated with each other through the replacement: “Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you” (I. i. 91). She explains, “When the audience meets the noble Moor, his blackness has been verbally linked with ugliness, the strange and unnatural, gross animal sensuality, and the evil of the devil himself (1974: 251).

As the play progresses, the portrait of race and being black can be seen more explicitly. Iago cannot bear Othello as he is black. He thinks that a black person cannot be such a successful soldier and cannot marry a white woman. When he learns Desdemona, daughter of the Brabantio, secretly marries Othello, he alarms Brabantio with a poisonous racist language. In order to depict language of Othello’s being introduced to audience by Iago, Adelman (1997: 125) states:

For the first long minutes of the play, we know only the Moor, “the thicklips” (I.i.66), has done something that Roderigo -like the audience- feels he should have been told about before hand; we find out what it is for the first time only through Iago’s violently eroticizing and racializing report to Brabantino: “Even now, very now, an old black ram / Is tuppung your white ewe” (II.i. 88-89).

Indeed, the infidelity of a daughter to his father is unacceptable in Elizabethan age; however, the reality of the fact that Othello is 'Black' and a 'Moor' aggravates the situation. Brabantio verbalizes his feelings with the words: "With the Moor, say'st thou? (Who would be a father!)" (I.i.163). As Othello steals his daughter from him, Brabantio is so furious that he says to Roderigo, who has also wanted to marry beautiful Desdemona, "O, that you had had her!" (I.i.174). Desdemona's marriage to a man that he does not approve is more acceptable than her marriage to a black Moor.

If Othello had not caused this, he would have stood a good soldier serving to them. Especially at that night of defense Othello when warned by Iago for the things that Brabantio can do to him, it comes out that even Othello is not in peace with his origin and being black. Rather than defining himself as a Moor he desires to be accepted as a Venetian and pronounces his place in society as:

Let him do his spite:
My services which I have done the signiory
Shall out-tongue his complaints. 'Tis yet to know,--
Which, when I know that boasting is an honour,
I shall promulgate--I fetch my life and being
From men of royal siege, and my demerits
May speak unbonneted to as proud a fortune
As this that I have reach'd: (I.ii.18-25)

Actually, even Othello is aware of the fact that if it was not for his being a good soldier, he could not survive in Venetian society especially after this marriage. The obvious reality shows itself when Duke does not punish Othello after he learns it is Othello who elopes Desdemona although he promises Brabantio to do what is necessary before. The reason of this behavior is unquestionably for the fact that they need Othello for the current situation of Cyprus.

Through the defense night it comes out how barbarous an image Othello has in the eyes of Brabantio. His being black and belonging to another race blocks all the good happenings. To him, his skin color is such a dreadful phenomenon that the love and this fact of being black cannot congregate. The extraordinary case is that more than Desdemona's secret marriage, her marriage with a black man is questioned. There exists nothing for Brabantio to ground Desdemona's preference on. He is so blind with the blackness of Othello that he depends her daughter's running on his bewitching her. He thinks that if there were no bewitching, his daughter could not bear and stay with him because the blackness of Othello would give horror to Desdemona:

O thou foul thief, where hast thou stow'd my daughter?
Damn'd as thou art, thou hast enchanted her;

For I'll refer me to all things of sense,
If she in chains of magic were not bound,
Whether a maid so tender, fair and happy,
So opposite to marriage that she shunned
The wealthy curled darlings of our nation,
Would ever have, to incur a general mock,
Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom
Of such a thing as thou, to fear, not to delight.

Judge me the world, if 'tis not gross in sense
That thou hast practised on her with foul charms,
Abused her delicate youth with drugs or minerals
That weaken motion: I'll have't disputed on;
'Tis probable and palpable to thinking. (I.ii.62-76)

Upon these accusations, Desdemona is given the right to speak, and by means of this we learn what she thinks about Othello's appearance. In spite of the fact that she loves Othello and marries him without permission of Brabantio, even she accepts that she cannot be impressed by his physical appearance. When it comes to defend herself and her love to her husband she justifies her feelings of Othello: "I saw Othello's visage in his mind" (I.iii.252).

The most irreversible fault of Othello is marrying beautiful and most importantly white Desdemona. Indeed, it is not a fault when considering the love and affection between them. However, the race of Othello should be taken into consideration. In the light of this, it will be understood that in a society where exists great prejudice and inferiority against other races significantly against blacks, international marriage cannot be accepted easily. Berry indicates that the matter of Othello's race has intentionally been neglected by critics. The issue of race has continuously kept its being explosive especially when it includes miscegenation, and brings about avoidance (1990: 315). This marriage is the spark that starts the fire of racism. In addition to this, it causes seeds of hatred leaf out in the heart of villain Iago who already hates Othello. As Iago is not chosen as lieutenant, he grounds his reasons of revenge on Othello's race. Iago's jealousy having factor of race in the center leads him up to preparing the end of Othello. From now on, his only aim is to destroy him. At that point, what helps Iago to go through with his plan is the severe fact of Othello's blackness and so-called devil image. He believes that Desdemona will not bear her husband for a long time:

It cannot be that Desdemona should long continue
Her love to the Moor - put money in thy purse - nor he
His to her: it was a violent commencement, and thou shalt
See an answerable sequestration - put but money in thy
Purse. These Moors are changeable in their wills - fill thy

Purse with money. The food that to him now is as
Luscious as locusts, shall be to him shortly as bitter as
Coloquintida. She must change for youth: when she is
Sated with his body, she will find the error of her choice:
She must have change, she must. Therefore put money
In thy purse. (I.iii.340-350)

When the devilish plans of Iago continue, in his speech to Roderigo he asserts that the feelings of Desdemona will fade away in time and fed up with her husband. He supports his theory with Desdemona's search for beauty in Othello after getting bored with the stories of the Moor. To him, she will not take pleasure from looking this devil's face:

Lay thy finger thus, and let thy soul be instructed. Mark
Me with what violence she first loved the Moor, but for
Bragging and telling her fantastical lies. And will she
Love him still for prating? Let not thy discreet heart
Think it. Her eye must be fed; and what delight shall she
Have to look on the devil? When the blood is made dull
With the act of sport, there should be, again to inflame
It and to give satiety a fresh appetite, loveliness in
Favour, sympathy in years, manners and beauties; all
Which the Moor is defective in. Now, for want of these
Required conveniences, her delicate tenderness will find
Itself abused, begin to heave the gorge, disrelish and
Abhor the Moor. Very nature will instruct her in it and
Compel her to some second choice. (II.i. 216-229)

The hatred of race fertilizes the seeds of devilish plans. Iago arouses Othello's suspicions of his wife. What feed his goal and the strong belief that he will succeed is the feeling of inferiority complex of Othello. Not only he himself ostracizes Othello, but also turns others against him and it represent his thoughts of being black, to some extent proving natural possibility of being cheated. Othello's origin results in his alienation and this alienation intensifies his beliefs that Desdemona can cheat him. As Özen (2004: 3) emphasizes Othello's estrangement is connected to his 'ethnicity and culture', and the color of his skin cause him feel alienated by the 'white Venetian' society as a result he does not thrust Desdemona considering that he is not well enough for her. She adds:

"Othello's blindness on love is due to his lack of self-knowledge as well as self-confidence for he is a Moor," that is to say as a beautiful Venetian woman's appealing to a

Moor is not natural according to society, Othello more 'strengthens his belief in his wife's infidelity': "Haply, for I am black...She's gone" (III.iii.263-9).

Although Othello is a good character except for his being a 'Black and a Moor', his killing of Desdemona makes him bad even in the eyes of the people who think good of him. Emilia, Iago's wife also servant of Desdemona, never brings up the subject of Othello's race; however upon this murdering she burst into hatred of race: "O, the more angel she, And you the blacker devil!" (V.ii. 129-31). Berry indicates:

"Her cynical attitude towards men has apparently masked a revulsion against Othello's blackness. Having exposed his evil, Othello becomes for her a "blacker devil," the phrase revealing that in her imagination he has always been a black devil" (1990: 320).

Little expresses that Othello's blackness, his marriage to the white Desdemona, and murdering of her are important constitutional elements of the play. Indeed, these factors have a relation. Othello's killing Desdemona is related to their marriage and their marriage contributes to Othello's blackness. Every element is reiteration of the others and as the starting point of the play's suspense and disturbance Othello's blackness is seen (1993: 306).

Consequently, the unavoidable and destructive effects of racism change lives of Othello and Desdemona deeply. It is observed that a society having the prejudice of racism can restrain love and sometimes there cannot be the limitation of racist people at destroying the people's happiness. Iago's bad character development progressing on the way of damaging Othello with feeling of racism and even dedicating himself to working under the devastating power of the racism is experienced. Othello cannot spread the clouds in front of his own eyes, and insist on being unaware of Iago's step by step poisoning of him against his wife. Essentially, Othello has resentment of his roots and Iago is already aware of this and it provides him to ruin Othello's life. Othello's psychology is affected by his race and he has the feeling of isolation. This is the most dependable arm that Iago has and the gun which triggers the thought that as others threat him as inferior, his wife can also cheat him. He becomes so blind with manipulations of villain Iago that he prepares the death of his faithful Desdemona and his own destruction.

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