

CHAPTER 9

Adapting *Othello* for television in late Francoist Spain

It's all about the 'Moor'

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Estudio 1 was a TV theatre series created during Franco's dictatorship in which Shakespeare's plays were regularly produced to serve the propaganda interests of the regime. In this paper, we explore a *Estudio 1* production of *Othello* (1972) analyzing the contradictory meanings and readings that the figure of the 'Moor' has in the Spanish collective imaginary. The portrayal of Othello by the late Francoist TV adaptation confirms and authorises Spanish fears and prejudices about a militaristic, exotic but ultimately jealous and brutal 'Moor', who *must* be different from any form of 'Spanish' identity. The Shakespearean tragedy therefore offers the perfect opportunity to legitimise the 'Moor' as constructed in the crucible of Spanish history and memory – a dangerous 'Other' whose ultimate death following Iago's revenge is a political and cultural necessity at the end of the tragedy.

Keywords: adaptation, *Othello*, Francoist Spain, Moor, identity, televised plays, *Estudio 1*

Introduction

On 18 July 1964, Francisco Franco opened the facilities of Prado del Rey, “the biggest TV set in Europe at that time” (Televisión Española 2006, par. 5).¹ It became the setting for *Estudio 1*, a theatre series created for the first channel by Televisión Española (TVE), the state-owned and sole television broadcaster during Franco's

1. “El plató más grande de Europa por aquellas fechas.” All translations from Spanish throughout this chapter have been carried out by Laura Campillo, unless otherwise indicated. See “50 años de TVE. Década a década. Década de los 60. La expansión de Televisión Española” in Televisión española's oficial website http://www.rtve.es/tve/50_aniversario/decada_60_50anyos.htm

regime. This TV programme was one of the emblems of the national television for almost 20 years, featuring filmed theatrical performances by several Spanish and international playwrights from 1965 to 1984, including Lope de Vega, Calderón de la Barca, Molière, Shakespeare, Ibsen or Chekhov, to cite a few.

Broadcast weekly at peak viewing time, *Estudio 1* was highly regarded by the spectators and became one of the landmarks of the history of TVE. The programme also turned out to be a school of interpretation in which renowned actors of the Spanish theatre performed the great plays of the Spanish and Western canon for television. Both directors and actors had to learn to work with a new audiovisual language since television was a new phenomenon. The Golden Decade of theatre on TVE lasted from 1965 to 1975, and throughout this decade hundreds of plays were televised; classical and modern, Spanish and foreign, with unforgettable productions such as *La vida es sueño* [*Life is a Dream*] (1967) or *Twelve Angry Men* (1973). *Estudio 1*, together with other theatre series such as *Teatro de siempre*, formed a flourishing genre on TVE since its earliest days of broadcasting that would extend its success until its final production in 1984.

With an evidently conservative motivation, Shakespeare's plays – mainly tragedies – were regularly produced to serve the propaganda interests of the regime in order to promote 'a national' television, similarly to the way that Shakespeare was appropriated to promote 'a national' theatre. As Holderness remarks, television can claim "more than any other cultural form, to be a national communications medium, the primary system of an authentically 'national' culture" (2002, 7).

Right from the start, the series showed its bardolatry, regularly programming TV adaptations of Shakespeare's plays: *Julius Caesar* (1965), *The Merchant of Venice* (1967), *Henry IV* (1967), *Hamlet* (1970), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1971), *Romeo and Juliet* (1972), *Othello* (1972), and *The Taming of the Shrew* (1979). TVE also demonstrated its zeal for Shakespeare on the minority channel two by broadcasting Shakespeare's plays in another theatre series known as *Teatro de siempre*, which produced plays such as *King Lear* (1967), *Richard III* (1967), *Romeo and Juliet* (1967), *The Comedy of Errors* (1970), *Pericles* (1970), *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1971) and *Timon of Athens* (1972). The second channel started broadcasting in 1966, and what it lacked in resources it made up for with a lot of enthusiasm. To a certain extent, this channel was created by the new generation of actors and directors that graduated from the official film school, and they provided the medium with a new look. Apart from offering mass entertainment giving popular audiences the opportunity to enjoy Shakespeare, broadcasters sensed the educational possibilities of television, mirroring the endeavours of British television, which had started to broadcast Shakespearean productions specifically made for television in 1937.

It is interesting to note that, of the nine Shakespearean plays broadcast during the dictatorship,² there seems to be a tendency to move away from the overtly political plays produced during the 1960s towards the ‘safer’, intimate sphere of love-themed comedies and tragedies produced during the 1970s (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*). Although the political and social aspects of these plays are obvious, these features are downplayed in the TV productions to focus on the issue of love and the happily reunited or doomed lovers, with *Othello* specifically being presented as a ‘domestic tragedy’.³

In the present chapter, we explore a black-and-white production of *Othello* released on 7 April 1972 on *Estudio 1*, directed by Gustavo Pérez Puig from the script adaptation by the poet, writer and dramatist Antonio Gala. This was the first time that the play had been shot for the small screen, for, up to that point, Spanish audiences had only experienced *Othello* on stage, with Alberto González Vergel’s staging of *Othello* in Madrid the previous year being the most recent and most innovative approach to the tragedy. Until the groundbreaking *Othello* by González Vergel, the tragedy had always been staged according to the tenets of the Franco regime, which included the censorship of controversial passages regarding politics, religion, sex and the avoidance of indecorous language. However, Vergel offered a different reading of *Othello* on the national stage, an approach with Marxist leanings that the Spanish audiences discovered on 30 October 1971. This was not the first time that González Vergel had turned a classical work into a social and political critique, however, managing to slip past the censors and “showing a desire to break the barriers of the Spanish stage” (Gregor 2010, 101). As opposed to previous productions of *Othello*, Bandín highlights the fact that:

Alberto González Vergel’s *mise-en-scène*, based on the text by Ángel Fernández Santos and Miguel Rubio, sought to displace romantic interpretations of the play by putting Iago at the forefront of the tragedy and presenting a sociological conflict, with both Othello and Iago as the oppressed victims of the capitalist system. (Bandín 2011, 126)

2. *Julius Caesar* (1965), *Macbeth* (1966), *The Merchant of Venice* (1967), *Henry IV* (1967), *Richard III* (revived from *Teatro de siempre* in 1969), *Hamlet* (1970), *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1971), *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* (both in 1972).

3. The last Shakespearean play broadcast in *Estudio 1* after Franco’s death and during Spain’s transition towards a constitutional democracy seems to confirm this tendency, as it was *The Taming of the Shrew* (1979).

The *Othello* produced by *Estudio 1*, however, would return to and develop a more ‘faithful’ adaptation of the play, and despite being shot in a cramped studio set with technical limitations, the tragedy nonetheless became a remarkable small-screen breakthrough for the cultural and social context of the period. To ensure the success of the production, Pérez Puig’s wisest decision was to cast respected theatre and film actor Alfredo Alcón in the role of Othello. Alcón, considered one of Argentina’s finest actors, worked extensively in film, theatre and television, and was often recruited by Spanish filmmakers and theatre directors as his Spanish ancestry gave him a fluent Castilian accent that allowed him to perform in Spain as well as in Argentina.⁴ Alcón was a Shakespearian actor who played Hamlet, Richard III, Prospero, Othello and Lear masterfully. He dearly loved Shakespeare’s plays because, as he remarked, “these plays are like putting your fingers in an electric socket, where one has always the feeling that it is a livelier place than yourself” (Mur 2014, para. 6).⁵ Acclaimed by both critics and audiences alike, Alfredo Alcón was considered “The Premier Argentinian Actor,” and in the obituary written after his death in 2014, he was fondly remembered by the Spanish press:

[Alcón] involved himself in and loved the characters he played; hence the great intensity which he transmitted and which shook the audience. He was body and soul. He was voice and gesture. Alcón savoured every sentence and invested every word, gesture and meaning with dramatic power. (Mur 2014, par. 5)⁶

In his review of the *Estudio 1* adaptation, the critic Enrique del Corral acclaimed the production highlighting both the director’s skill and the poetic version by Antonio Gala: “Gala wrote a clear, direct, poetic and homogeneous script which preserves the Shakespearian essence while losing neither inspiration nor scent” (1972, 72).⁷ The shortening and adaptation of the text is justified by the prerogatives of the medium

4. It was common practice in Spain at the time to invite international actors (especially from Mexico and South America) as part of the casting of stage productions, films and TV programs. As a matter of fact, Alcón had already performed on the Spanish stage in 1965, in *A Electra le sienta bien el luto* [*Mourning becomes Electra*] (Madrid, Teatro María Guerrero), and in the Spanish-Argentinian film of *Los inocentes* [*The Innocents*] directed by Juan Antonio Bardem in 1963.

5. “Estas obras son como meter el dedo en el enchufe, donde siempre se tiene la sensación de que se trata de un lugar más vivo que uno.”

6. “Se incorporaba los personajes y los amaba, tal vez por eso la tremenda intensidad que transmitía y con la que lograba estremecer. Era carne y alma. Era voz y gesto. Alcón degustaba cada frase e invertía de dramaticidad cada segundo en el que palabra, postura o significado tienen lugar.”

7. “Gala escribió un guión homogéneo, perfecto, claro, directo y poético en el que mantuvo vivas las esencias shakespearianas sin que perdieran ni aliento ni perfume.”

and by the type of audience that the play targeted: “the massive and indiscriminate character of the audience requires that the texts be clarified” (72).⁸ Pérez Puig’s *Othello* was acclaimed as his greatest TV success since he used “a fluid and homogeneous graphic language with a calm tone, with sequence shots of eloquent expression and clean and soft transitions” (72).⁹ As a matter of fact, *Estudio 1* productions became formal experiments in broadcasting, and modes of performance were influenced by the medium-specific conditions of early television. Pérez Puig used the full range of cinematographic techniques available at the time. One indispensable camera technique (over)used in this production is the close shot, to convey to the audience with more precision Othello and Iago’s emotional feelings or states of mind. In order to transfer the asides of the play to the screen, Pérez Puig combined the close-up with the use of the voice-over technique to gain access to the characters’ thoughts.

Considering the three different approaches to shooting Shakespeare on TV suggested by Michèle Willems (1999, 74), the *realistic/naturalistic*, the *pictorial* and the *stylized*, Pérez Puig’s production of *Othello* can be defined as realistic as the director attempted to create settings that would convey the period implied by the world of the original play. As Hindle points out, “more often than not, doing it ‘realistically’ means creating a large representational set designed to model historically accurate constructions for a play’s interior and exterior settings” (Hindle 2015, 252). The rationale for this approach stemmed from the idea that TV viewers were unfamiliar with Shakespeare’s plays, spectators whom TVE wanted to attract and educate. With this goal in mind, the producers aimed for a strong *representation*, or realism of place, which in terms of TV camera deployment meant using the theatrical practice of *mise-en-scène*, “composing and manipulating what is to be seen into the totality of a single shot and its depth of field” (251). This production, like many others by *Estudio 1*, possessed an undeniable aesthetic quality, displaying technical skill and a praiseworthy *mise-en-scène*. The theatre series also achieved its social and educational goal by instructing popular audiences to appreciate Shakespeare’s works, taking advantage of the clarity and directness of the audiovisual language and moving away from the intellectualism and formulaic quality that characterised the performance of the plays on the stage of the national theatre.

Following the tendency in European contexts, the play is labelled a domestic tragedy that revolves around jealousy. Whereas in Anglo-American cultural contexts the issue of race acquires more prominence, the European, and especially Spanish, stage history of *Othello* focuses on the domestic elements of the tragedy. The editing of the production reinforces the idea that the audience is watching a jealousy play,

8. “El carácter masivo e indiscriminado de la audiencia televisual exige clarificar los textos.”

9. “Lenguaje gráfico, entrañado y homogéneo, fluido y sereno con plano secuencia de elocuente expresión y con mutaciones limpias.”

a genre exploited by Golden Age playwrights such as Calderón and Lope de Vega. In order to emphasise jealousy as the main theme, after the voice-over's introduction, the *Estudio 1* production displays a condensed adaptation of the tragedy's first scene in which two key issues are highlighted: Desdemona's elopement with the Moor and Iago's jealousy. It is only then that the opening credits are introduced, with the short scene serving as the prologue that sets the main domestic themes of the adaptation. We would like to stress that the issue of Iago's resentment at being denied the position of lieutenant in lieu of Cassio, while important, is overshadowed by the *fait accompli* of Othello's seduction of Emilia, Iago's wife. While this is an issue which is only suspected by Iago in the original ("I hate the Moor, / And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets / He's done my office," 1.3.368–370)¹⁰ and denied by Emilia herself ("Some such squire he was / That turned your wit the seamy side without / And made you to suspect me with the Moor," 4.2.144–46), in the Spanish TV version the suspicion becomes a fact at the very beginning of the tragedy. In this way, Iago's main motivation for getting back at Othello becomes avenging his honour as a cheated husband, something that Iago also voices in the original tragedy ("Till I am evened with him, wife for wife," 2.1.280), but which becomes the sole motivation for Iago in the Spanish adaptation.

This crucial change not only sets the scene for the unfolding of the domestic tragedy, but, as we will argue, a domestic tragedy with very specific connotations for Spanish audiences, since Iago is cheated by none other than a 'Moor'. Indeed, Othello is *The Moor of Venice*, but the contradictory meanings, readings and implications that the figure of the 'Moor' has in the Spanish collective imaginary are very different from the way that this figure is read and understood in other European cultural contexts. An analysis of what 'Moor' means in the complex crucible of Spanish history, memory and identity is therefore key to fully understanding the impact of this TV adaptation for late Francoist audiences.

The figure of the 'Moor' in the Spanish collective imaginary

Moro, from the Latin *maurus* (derived from the Greek *Maûros*, "dark") was the Roman term used to refer to the Berbers of North Africa. The first definition of *moro* in the *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española* refers to this idea, defining the term as: "Of North African origin, from the northern border with Spain" (*Moro* 1, adj.). The third definition indicates that a Moor is: "One who professes the Islamic faith" (*Moro* 3, adj.), and the fourth: "A Muslim person, who inhabited Spain from the 8th

10. All quotes from the tragedy have been taken from Sanders (2003).

to the 15th century” (*Moro* 4, adj.). These first definitions reveal how encompassing and complex the term “Moor” is in Spanish, as it collapses geographical, religious and historical issues. *Moro* becomes even more problematic as the next definitions establish that the adjective may refer to a breed of horse (*Moro* 7, adj.); to a wine that has not been watered down (*Moro* 8, adj.); to a child that has not been baptized (*Moro* 9, adj.) and to a jealous and possessive man who dominates his wife (*Moro* 10, adj.). The lingering stereotypes and ethnographic, racial and social prejudices that we find in these definitions cannot be understood without reflecting, however briefly, on the controversial question of how Spanish national identity has been historically constructed in opposition to the ‘Moorish Other’.

In his seminal essay *Crónicas sarracinas* [*Saracen Chronicles*] (1982), Spanish essayist, poet and novelist Juan Goytisolo analysed several aspects of Spanish literature and culture from the Middle Ages well into the Francoist and post-Francoist literary and political panorama. Goytisolo established that the figure of the ‘Moor’ has been constructed according to a reductive dichotomy oscillating between two prejudiced stereotypes: the bloody, savage, cruel Moor and the exotic, idyllic, sensual Moor. This ‘Moorish Other’ has traditionally been the stuff of ballads, poems, novels, with authors swaying between *maurophilia* and *maurophobia* in their writings:

With the Arab invasion, the horizon of Spanish life has been dominated, as a matter of fact, by the contrast between the Christian and the Moor [...] Feared, envied, fought, reviled, the Muslim [first, Sarracen, then Turk, and finally Moroccan] has fed for over ten centuries legends and fantasies; has inspired songs and poems; has featured in plays and novels; and has powerfully stimulated the mechanisms of our imagination. (Goytisolo [1982] 2005, 231)¹¹

In his essay, Goytisolo analyses the negative image and racist stereotypes of the ‘Moor’ in Spanish literature, studying several sixteenth-century literary works to conclude that this figure defines the problem of otherness in Spanish culture: “the fabrication of the Other in positive terms is the result of the same social and psychological principles that project the phantasmagoria and myths about the ‘barbarian’ in our complex and contradictory mental scene” (Goytisolo 2005, 237).¹²

11. “Desde la invasión árabe, el horizonte de la vida española está dominado, en efecto, por la contraposición entre el cristiano y el moro [...] Temido, envidiado, combatido, denostado, el musulmán [primero sarraceno, luego turco, y por último marroquí] alimenta desde hace diez siglos leyendas y fantasías, motiva cantares y poemas, protagoniza dramas y novelas, estimula poderosamente los mecanismos de nuestra imaginación.”

12. “la fabricación del Otro en términos positivos responderá así a los mismos principios sociales y síquicos que proyectan la fantasmagoría y mitos sobre el ‘bárbaro’ en nuestra compleja y contradictoria escenografía mental.”

In *The Return of the Moor: Spanish Responses to Contemporary Moroccan Immigration*, Daniela Flesler delves deeper into this idea: “both historical and fictional ‘Moors’ coexist in the same symbolic paradigm in the Spanish cultural imaginary” (2008, 3–4). As the author observes, in Spanish the term *Moros* “contains considerable affect [and] highly negative connotations,” which can be tracked to the historical necessity to extricate the ‘Moorish’ from the ‘Spanish’ (2008, 3). Indeed, the seven centuries of Islamic Spain (from the Muslim conquest in 711 to the Reconquest of Granada in 1492 by the Catholic Monarchs) “aligned Spain more with Africa than with Europe, a reality that has been haunting the history of the Iberian country since medieval and early modern times” (Sánchez-García 2019, 25). Constructed as the traditional enemy of Spain on the basis of an otherness rooted in terms of race, religion and geopolitical configuration, the ‘Moorish Other’ is non-European; he belongs to Berber and Arab ethnic groups; he is a practising Muslim and therefore stands in stark contrast with the idea of a white, European, Catholic Spaniard. However, this category of otherness proves to be extremely unstable, because as Meyerson points out when analyzing the coexistence of the Muslims and the Catholics in Early Modern Spain:

One of the paradoxes of Spanish history, it seems to me, is that the legal, literary, and polemical texts in which the ‘other’ was constructed often were produced because the ‘other’ had become too familiar and hence too dangerous, because the ‘other’ was not ‘other’ at all. (Meyerson 1991, xiii)

Spanish identity was thus forged in opposition to the idea of the invading, Islamic, threatening Moor, a slow process that started with the Reconquest of Granada in 1492 and reached its apex with the Expulsion of the *Moriscos* in 1609.¹³

The historical echoes of this configuration of the ‘Moorish Other’ were revived during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), as nearly 80,000 Moroccan troops were deployed to fight in Spain for the right-wing Nationalist forces against Republican ones (Balfour 2002, 312). “The Return of the Moors” according to Bolorinos Allard “would leave a dramatic imprint on the collective psyche of the Spanish nation” (2015, 1), and the image of the cruel, barbaric Moor who killed and pillaged his way through Spanish villages would have a deep, lasting impact in the shared Spanish memory of the Civil War.

Although seemingly paradoxical, it is crucial to note that both the Nationalists and the Republicans appropriated and constructed the figure of the Moor during the Civil War according to their different political agendas:

13. The *Moriscos* (‘Little Moors’) were the Spanish Muslims and their descendants who had been forced by the Catholic Church and the Spanish crown to convert to Christianity, and who were expelled from Spain by order of King Philip III.

Nationalist representations of the Moor served as a *mirror* for the Nationalists, reflecting and affirming their self-constructed identity as a strong militaristic nation with an imperial destiny, while Republican representations served as a *window* through which Republicans witnessed, and set themselves apart from, the betrayal and brutality of the Nationalist insurgents. (Bolorinos Allard 2015, 3)

The figure of the Moor was therefore used to legitimise the ‘true’ Spanish identity that both sides claimed for themselves; capitalizing on both *maurophilia* and *maurophobia* in a new wartime discourse about the ‘Moorish Other’ that was exploited in different ways. The Nationalists argued for a “cultural, religious, and military brotherhood between Spain and Morocco,” whereas “the notion of a ‘class’ brotherhood between the Spanish and Moroccan people was a significant theme in Republican discourse” (*ibid.*). Nationalist propaganda portrayed the Republicans as the new invading Moors, an enemy that would be defeated as in the medieval past; whereas Republican propaganda portrayed the Nationalists with ‘Moorish qualities’ such as cruelty, savagery and cowardice. However, something on which both sides agreed was depicting the Moor as dumb: he was a natural born simpleton who was unable to master the Spanish language; a figure who spoke *en moro*, that is, in broken Spanish. This aural and linguistic otherness reinforced the racial stereotypes of the ‘Moor’ used by both sides to construct and validate their ‘Spanish essence’ against each other.

Thus, during the Civil War, the ‘Moor’ was both warrior and victim; invader and brother; friend and enemy; Spanish and Other; a figure where historical prejudices and xenophobic stereotypes converged to create the image of a cruel, dumb and untrustworthy Moor that still co-existed with the romanticized image of the sensual, exotic and captivating Moor. These mostly negative representations are still very much present in Spain today; whether in the racist representations of Moroccan immigrants in Spanish movies¹⁴ or in the festivals of the *Moros y Cristianos* (‘Moors and Christians’), where the popular image of the medieval Moor, successfully articulated in oriental and exotic stereotypes, is still conquered, defeated and appropriated with the use of ritualistic, aestheticized violence on the part of the Christians.¹⁵

14. Such as, for example, *Canícula* (directed by Álvaro García-Capelo, 2001) or *Poniente* (directed by Chus Gutiérrez, 2002). For a full discussion on this issue, see Laura Navarro García, “Racismo y medios de comunicación: Representaciones del inmigrante magrebí en el cine español” (2009).

15. Flesler argues that current confrontations between Spaniards and Moroccans (such as in the xenophobic El Ejido attacks in 2000) reproduce a discourse of verbal and physical violence also present in the festivities of the Moors and Christians. For a full discussion, see Flesler (2008), especially chapter three: “Playing Guest and Host: Moors and Christians, Moroccans and Spaniards in Historical Novels and Festive Reenactments” (97–130).

Given this historical, social and cultural background, it is our contention that one of the as yet not fully explored reasons that has historically contributed to the stunning and lasting success of *Othello* in Spain, whether in performances, operas or parodies, lies in the fact that the Shakespearean tragedy offers the perfect opportunity to legitimise the ‘Moorish Other’ as constructed in the Spanish collective imagery. In our opinion, such is the case of the *Estudio 1* production, whose portrayal of Othello confirms and authorises Spanish fears and prejudices about a militaristic, exotic but ultimately jealous and brutal ‘Moor’, who *must* be different from any form of ‘Spanish’ identity.

Analysis of *Estudio 1*’s *Otelo*

As stated before, one of the main purposes of the *Estudio 1* televised productions was to instruct a popular audience about Shakespeare’s works. Thus, as was customary in the TV series, *Othello* begins with a commentary presented on the soundtrack as a voice-over, which introduces the play in order to make Shakespeare accessible to the general public and clarify some relevant aspects of the tragedy: the first date of performance, the sources, characters, theme and plot. The commentary was written and read out loud for the recording by Francisco García Pavón, a famous novelist and literary critic who also taught at the Madrid School Drama. Using black and white pictorial images of Venice, the commentator briefly explains the plot of the tragedy and makes a number of claims that must be analysed with particular attention, for not only do they resonate with the conflicting issues that we have previously explained, but also because they inevitably shape audience response by offering spectators key ideas about how to read and understand the tragedy.

The introduction establishes several points: (1) *Othello* is a masterful creation of Shakespeare, whose genius turned the plot of some Italian *novella* into the universal model of the domestic tragedy;¹⁶ (2) Spanish playwright Calderón de la Barca would later write about the issue of jealousy in his play *El mayor monstruo, los celos* [*Jealousy, the Greatest Monster*] (1637);¹⁷ (3) the tragedy originates as a result of the master’s ingenuity and the subordinate’s intelligent evil, who wants to avenge

16. “Shakespeare, que sacó el tema de *Otelo* de un oscuro repertorio de novelle [sic] italianas, elevó una vez más con su genio una leve noticia narrativa en una de las más grandes obras dramáticas de todos los tiempos, en el modelo universal de la tragedia doméstica” (*Estudio 1*, Introduction).

17. “Efectivamente, son los celos, “el mayor monstruo,” como escribió Calderón” (*Estudio 1*, Introduction).

himself on Othello and destroy him due to a past injustice;¹⁸ and (4) Shakespeare creates the character of Othello as exotic and African, presenting him as a brave captain, but also naïve and primordial; as a simple soul who is easily fooled by Iago, falling into the handkerchief trap as “the big dark-skinned child that he is.”¹⁹

Firstly, the historical, political and military background of the Turkish attack on Cyprus in the original tragedy is downplayed in the TV adaptation. As the voice-over states right from the beginning that *Othello* is “the model of the domestic tragedy,” the audience’s expectations are already shaped and conditioned, and little to no attention will be devoted to other issues in the adaptation.

Secondly, the reference to Calderón de la Barca and his play *Jealousy, the Greatest Monster* seems more a literary nod to a well-known and established Spanish playwright, whose famous plays had also been produced by *Estudio 1*, than an effort to compare both playwrights, as Shakespeare is clearly established as the universal theatrical genius from the start. Thirdly, the “past injustice” that Iago wants to avenge is purposefully left ambiguous in the introduction. However, less than five minutes into the play, Iago is certain that Othello has slept with his wife Emilia in the past, therefore providing a solid motive for his revenge. Although Iago mentions his resentment against Othello following the appointment of Cassio as lieutenant, these affronts are overshadowed by Othello’s adultery. The televised adaptation is notorious for cutting almost all of Iago’s monologues and asides, a decision that simplifies the play, firmly grounds it in the domestic tragedy genre and prevents the audience from fully understanding Iago’s evil psychological development.

Finally, and most importantly, the voice-over credits Shakespeare with creating the protagonist that the audience is going to see and hear; but in reality, the Shakespearean Othello is far removed from the figure described in the narration and performed by Alfredo Alcón. The protagonist that the paternalistic voice-over describes collapses all the racial stereotypes of the ‘Moorish Other’ as lingering in the Spanish collective imagery and memory: Othello is “exotic” and “African,” and despite being a brave captain,²⁰ he is basically “naïve and primordial”; a “simple soul easily fooled” and, at the end of the day, a “big dark-skinned child.” The worst

18. “La tragedia estalla entre la ingenuidad del jefe y la malignidad inteligente del subordinado para vengarse de una injusticia” (*Estudio 1*, Introduction).

19. “Oteló, un carácter que Shakespeare, al hacerlo exótico y africano, quiere presentar como valeroso capitán, pero ingenuo y elemental también [...] El alma sencilla de Oteló cree todo lo que le dice Yago sin una duda, y cae en trampas como la del pañuelo, como el gran niño de piel oscura que es” (*Estudio 1*, Introduction).

20. The fact that Othello is demoted to captain, being a general in the Shakespearean play, seems a mistake in the Spanish adaptation, for he is called “captain” and “general” by several characters throughout the tragedy.

part of this description, however, may lie in the fact that this fabricated Othello would not have been exclusive to the Franco regime. As we previously said, both Nationalists and Republicans shared a number of common elements when fabricating the figure of the ‘Moorish Other’ during the Civil War, and for both sides the ‘Moor’ was essentially a dumb simpleton who could not speak proper Spanish. Despite the ideology of the audience at such a late year in the Francoist period, the voice-over makes sure that *all* viewers quickly identify Othello as an inherently dumb and a gullible fool, which ensured a common reception and reaction in the audience. And what the voice-over fails to mention (the poor linguistic proficiency of the ‘Moor’) Alfredo Alcón unwittingly provided.

Alcón was born in Buenos Aires in 1930, the grandchild of Spanish immigrants. He spoke Spanish with a soft yet distinctive Argentine accent in the many plays, films, and TV series that he starred in, but he could also turn to a Castilian accent, especially when he was acting in Spanish productions. However, specific traits of his Argentine accent always slipped through in his performances, noticeably the pronunciation of “z” and the “c” before “e” or “i” as /s/ instead of the Castilian /θ/, and also the aspiration of the final “s” in most words. Although barely noticeable, Alcón’s foreign accent is still there in his performance of Othello, which makes it immediately clear for a Spanish audience that he does not speak like a native Spaniard. This is highlighted by the fact that all the *Othello* cast, except for Alcón, are Spanish actors who speak with a perfect Castilian accent, which results in Othello being aurally different from the rest of the characters. The main protagonist is therefore isolated and alienated in a sea of Castilian accents right from the beginning of the play, a crucial fact that reinforces the otherness of Othello and emphasises the idea that this ‘Moor’ *sounds* but also does *not* sound Spanish. For the characters in the play *and* for the Spanish viewers of *Estudio 1*, Othello *is* yet *is not* ‘one of us’.

It is our contention that Othello’s imperfect aural assimilation to native Castilian is a decisive factor in establishing the figure of the ‘Moorish Other’ as vividly stamped in the shared collective imaginary of Spanish people after the Civil War. Beyond Othello’s visually recognizable construction as a ‘Moor’, with the black make-up used at the time, the golden earring in one ear, the lavish costumes and the curved dagger, Alcón’s Othello embodied the shared features of the ‘Moorish Other’ that both Nationalists and Republicans constructed to define their purported ‘Spanish essence’ – the ‘Moor’ is inherently dumb, brutal, and cannot speak proper Spanish.

The adaptation materializes this stereotype from beginning to end, but in our analysis, we will focus on two key scenes of the play. In act 1 scene 2, Othello tells Iago that his service to Venice will be enough to outweigh any complaint made against him by Brabantio:

ORIGINAL

OTHELLO ‘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 reached. (1.2.21–24)

ADAPTATION

OTELO. Los servicios que he prestado a Venecia lo harán callar, pues siendo como soy de sangre real, no por mi sangre, sino por mis méritos, ha llegado tan alto mi fortuna. (*Estudio 1*, 0:11:35)

(The services that I have done to Venice will quiet him [Brabantio] down, as being of royal blood, not because of my blood, but because of my merits, my fortune has grown so great.)

The fact that Othello affirms that he is of royal blood in the Shakespearean original, and therefore of noble origin, is at odds with the dumb ‘Moor’ that *Estudio 1* is constructing; so it is not surprising that, in the adaptation, Othello states the paradox that he is of royal blood to immediately say that he isn’t, specifying that the *nobility* that he enjoys is only due to his merits. And it is at this very moment that Alcón happens to aspirate the final “s” in the word “*servicios*,” which sounds very odd given that he ‘correctly’ pronounces the rest of the words. The aural effect reinforces the idea that it is impossible for a ‘Moor’ to be noble, as he cannot even speak properly. This, together with Othello’s adultery at the beginning of the play, shows the explicit *maurophobia* of the TV production. Despite presenting Othello as a respected soldier with a successful military career, this lukewarm moment of *maurophilia* is short-lived, and actually works as a warning for the audience, who, bearing witness to the ruthlessness and brutality of Othello in the final scene of the play, will be dutifully cautioned against trusting a ‘Moor’ despite his origin and merits.

In our opinion, the key scene that collapses the shared racial stereotypes of the ‘Moorish Other’ in the figure of Othello is found at the end of the tragedy. When realizing that Desdemona was innocent all along, Othello, who has strangled her with his bare hands *and* stabbed her to death with his curved dagger, falls to the floor slapping his forehead and exclaiming: “¡Necio! ¡Necio! ¡Necio!” (“O fool, fool, fool!” 5.2.319). Self-slapping – a non-verbal body language gesture typically meaning “How stupid of me” or “How could I have missed/forgotten that?” – is at odds with the gravity of the situation, and corroborates what the voice-over already told the audience at the beginning of the tragedy: Othello is a simpleton, and as such,

he laments his mistake. Furthermore, Alcón pronounces the first “*Necio*” in his Argentine accent; he then self-corrects in the second “*Necio*,” trying but failing to pronounce it in Castilian Spanish and finally reverts to the Argentine pronunciation in the third “*Necio*.” This linguistic breakdown turns Othello’s dreadful realization into a regrettable comic moment, as Spanish audiences see him slapping his forehead while saying: “*Nesio, Netsio, Nesio*.”

The fact that Othello finishes Desdemona off with his dagger aligns this *Estudio 1* production with neoclassical performances of *Othello*, when it was typical for her murder to be carried out in this way. But by staging her death like this, with the added implausibility of Desdemona regaining consciousness to claim her innocence, *Estudio 1* is not only distancing the adaptation from contemporary performances, but clearly stressing the brutality of Othello, who commits suicide by stabbing himself three consecutive times in the stomach. In our opinion, by staging these gruesome, bloody and melodramatic deaths, *Estudio 1* is purposefully recreating and validating the figure of the ‘Moorish Other’ as vividly stamped in the collective memory of the late Francoist audience. Thus, this *Estudio 1* production can be said to assert a ‘Spanish essence’ over the threatening ‘Moor’, validating the ‘Spanishness’ of the audience and reassuring them of their superiority over the protagonist. And there is indeed a feeling of the ‘Spanish’ Iago winning the day at the very end of the play.

When Othello confronts and stabs Iago (5.2), he asks a question that is absent in the original play: “Why, Iago? Why?”, to which Iago emphatically replies: “You and I. We know!” (*Estudio 1*, 1:50:17–26).²¹ Othello’s subsequent silence and acquiescence leave no doubt that he was guilty of adultery in the first place, and that Iago’s revenge, however wicked and inhuman, was a just cause to repair his ‘Spanish’ honour. ‘Spanish’ indeed, because the actor performing Iago, the villain yet rightful avenger of his honour, is the beloved Spanish actor Fernando Guillén Gallego, whose perfect Castilian accent, instantly recognizable by any Spanish audience, gives him the upper hand against Alfredo Alcón’s oddly foreign Othello. More than terrible, then, the vengeance exacted by the Castilian-speaking Iago is a political and cultural necessity at the end of the tragedy, as it establishes and perpetuates the dominant ‘Spanish identity’ over the menacing ‘Moorish Other’. The fact that Othello dies by his own hand, whereas Iago exclaims that he is only wounded, may well provide a touch of satisfaction for some spectators at the end of the play, as, in plain terms, the dumb ‘Moor’ has been defeated by a clever ‘Spaniard’. The icing on the cake is that this ‘Spaniard’ is called Iago, a reference to *Santiago Matamoros*, the Patron Saint of Spain, whose nickname translates literally as “killer of the Moors,” and who led successful military campaigns against the Muslims in the fifteenth century.

21. “Otel: “¿Por qué, Yago, por qué?”
“Yago: Tú y yo. ¡Lo sabemos!”

Conclusions

As Douglas Lanier notes in *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture*, popular appropriations of Shakespeare

communicate to a wide audience claims about what Shakespeare does and might mean to various cultural constituencies. They are, in short, productive, an important means by which notions about Shakespeare's cultural significance is created, extended, debated, revised, and renewed, not only parodied or critiqued.

(2002, 20)

The adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello* that we have studied here communicates to the wide late-Francoist audience of *Estudio 1* the satisfactory idea that the genius of Shakespeare created the figure of the 'Moor' just as Spanish people have constructed it in their shared collected history, memory and imaginary. In this appropriation, Shakespeare not only authorises the prejudices present in the Spanish fabrication of the 'Moor', but the Pyrrhic victory of Iago over Othello at the end of the tragedy legitimises the claim to a 'Spanish identity' that realises itself in the outwitting of and revenge against any 'Moorish Other'. "Intercultural appropriations reveal all Shakespearean appropriations to be rooted in particular, contingent communities," Huang and Rivlin (2014, 12) point out in their Introduction to *Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation*, and indeed, it is our contention that no Spanish production of *Othello* can be fully understood without taking into account the very specific cultural conflict of defining 'Spanish identity' against the figure of the 'Moorish Other'. Without this key element, whose origins are found in medieval and early modern Spain, the analysis and reception of Spanish productions of *Othello* will lack an important dimension in which to inscribe a controversy that has only grown more complex and problematic in the last few centuries. Although the memory of the Spanish Civil War was still fresh when this *Estudio 1* production was released in 1972, the racist, xenophobic stereotype of the 'Moor' has become compounded in our multicultural, contemporary Spanish society, so it is our hope that future research takes this dimension into account when analyzing and studying the reception of *Othello* in twenty-first-century Spain.

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