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RESEARCH ARTICLE

'Othering' in Westworld and Squid Game; A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract

'Othering' leads to polarization and creating the "self" and "others" based on wealth, power, and competition. In many media productions and particularly television series, 'othering' becomes integrated with race and culture. 'Othering' is a prominent component in *Westworld* (2016-) and *Squid Game* (2021-), two internationally popular TV series produced by American companies in America and South Korea. The primary objective of this paper is to explain and compare the various forms of 'othering' in these television series. The semiotics approach was used in the three-level model of explicit, implicit, and ideological implications to reach this goal. According to the results, while *Westworld* portrays othering as a continuum that allows moments of reversal and self-expression, *Squid Game* reveals a rigid center-periphery division that results in the continued passivity and exclusion of the Others. In the *Westworld*, 'others' with an anti-authoritarian agenda, organize an 'anti-power' led by white, black, and native americans heroes/elites, and the white hero maintains the most significant role in uniting 'others' against 'self'. In the *Squid Game*, on the contrary, due to the passive characters of the 'others', no rebellion or 'anti-power' community is represented against the whites. In both series, stereotyping is a central strategy to marginalize 'others'.

Keywords: Othering; Representation; *Westworld*; *Squid Game*; Stereotyping.

Introduction

Media productions, such as TV series, are considered social manifestations of the ideologies of the companies or organizations that produce them. In these drama productions, 'education and entertainment' (Slater and Rouner, 2002) and 'correlation of the parts of society and transmission of the social heritage' (Lasswell, 1960: 217) are combined as four primary

functions of media. This combination has made producers and consumers happy with the final product.

The ideological approaches of the producers of these cultural texts are noticeable in many TV series, particularly in the categories of 'race', 'culture', 'and social and economic classes'. Based on these approaches, different racial, cultural, social, and economic groups are represented, and the 'others' are defined through these representation regimes. We observe a system established on the center-periphery model in these art-media works, where 'othering' is generated and organized by this process of signification. "Otherness", rather than arising from the difference between "others", is related to the perspective and discourse of the person who judges "others"(Staszak, 2008: 1).

America and South Korea are western and eastern countries where the TV series industry has grown well. Several American and South Korean media companies and their products such as TV series are inspired by the idea of othering. This study is prompted by the observation that in certain television series in these countries, a particular perspective highlighted the 'other', thereby the confrontation and cooperation between the 'self' and the 'other' within these narratives can be studied. Through this study, it is also possible to understand the approaches of producer companies and countries while facing "others".

Westworld (an HBO production in America) and *Squid Game* (a Netflix production in South Korea) are two internationally new and popular TV series that can be examined in terms of 'othering'. So, investigating and analyzing the portrayal of 'others' in these series could result in significant political and cultural implications. Based on it, this article aims to present an explanation and comparison of the representation of 'others' in *Westworld* and *Squid Game*. The research questions posed in this study are as follows:

What are the types of the 'others' in the *Westworld* and *Squid Game* television series? How are these 'others' represented? What are the similarities and differences?

Research Background

The study of 'othering' is based on understanding the relationships and tensions between the 'center' (self) and 'around the center' (others). This research shows that the rejection of "others" is possible by using the "stereotyping" strategy.

- Othering in Hollywood

There has been a constant process of constructing stereotypes in the representation of 'others' in Hollywood, as demonstrated by various scholars. Pines (1977), Hall (1996), Barker (2008), Dyer (2005), Bichranlou and Torabi-Aghdam (2018), and Torabi-Aghdam and Fahimifar (2020) are among the researchers who modify, diversify and modernize Hollywood stereotypes about black people. Berny (2020) shows that parallel to the mythmaking of the West at the

beginning of the 20th century, the Hollywood industry recreated the double stereotype of the "noble" and "bloodthirsty savage" Indian. According to the findings of Manning (2020), these distorted images (in the comedy genre) have evolved over time.

Basana et al.'s (2019) research shows that the frequency of leading roles for Asian-Americans has increased in the last 25 years. However, the representations confirmed common stereotypes such as shy, timid, and extreme. Chang (2020) argues that Hollywood's diplomacy in representing Chinese, Japanese, and Korean ethnicities in reflecting Western culture's imaginations of these ethnicities within the framework of an "Imaginary Orient" have long been contested issues in which the commercial interests of Hollywood studios and political mandates of US foreign policy collide, compete with each other, and are often compromised in the process.

The findings of Tair et al. (2023) indicated that although Netflix seeks to minimize bias in the audio descriptions (AD) provided on its platform -particularly in productions such as *Passing*, *Kipo*, and *Squid Game*- subtle forms of bias remain present, some of which may be unintentional. Araujo and Albuquerque (2024) explore the algorithmic representation of China on the video-streaming platform Netflix, arguing that the company operates in an imperialistic manner by seeking monopolistic control over the global internet television market while reproducing biases conceptualized by the authors as "algorithmic orientalism." By framing China for Brazilian audiences through this algorithmically mediated lens, Netflix is positioned as a cultural gatekeeper that perpetuates hegemonically American worldviews.

- Othering in South Korea

In the context of the expansion of South Korea's media industry, representations of the "Other" have become increasingly visible within the country's media texts. Kang (2017) shows that Korean TV shows that focus on foreigners living in Korea are increasingly popular. Nevertheless, despite their stated goal of encouraging South Koreans to become a "more harmonious multicultural society," programs such as the "Non-Summit" seem to reproduce racialized colonialism within the framework of contemporary global capitalism. Oh (2020) by examining the mentioned program, concludes that Non-Summit gives more importance to Western liberal values in the representation of the "global/international citizen", although it also challenges them at times.

Istad et al. (2022) analyzed three Korean television programs with a multicultural theme and concluded that these programs act against the guidelines of the South Korean government regarding the non-discriminatory treatment of immigrants and minorities.

Cui and Gao (2025) argue that although racial and linguistic diversity in South Korea has been steadily increasing, limited progress has been made in addressing the deeply entrenched linguistic discrimination experienced by diasporic Koreans—particularly Korean-Chinese

communities. Their findings underscore the persistence of structural and social barriers that continue to marginalize these groups despite broader demographic changes.

Son and Kim (2023) found that South Korean subscribers exhibit a preference for media content that emphasizes narratives of national superiority in representations of South Korea in relation to North Korea.

The Korean media products examined in these studies, in the face of "others", mainly try to fall them by the wayside. In the previous researches, the representation of "others" has been studied only in one media system (America or South Korea), but in the upcoming research, the way of representation of "others" in two American "*Westworld*" and Korean "*Squid Game*" series will be investigated and compared.

Theoretical Framework

'Other' and 'Othering' are considered as concepts that are frequently in postcolonial studies and media representation. Gandhi (2019) categorizes postcolonial studies into two broad approaches: studies that examine oriental discourse patterns are known as "oriental" studies. Edward Said and some of his critics and followers such as Zia ol Din Sardar are among the most important researchers in this field of post-colonial studies; and studies that examine the features and characteristics of the discourse of writers and thinkers in developing countries in the post-colonial era, as exemplified in the work of Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha. According to Wood (2006), based on Said's point of view in the *Orientalism* book, many Westerners have considered the Eastern world, despite its great diversity, to be merely a dark and chaotic 'other' comparison to the systematic and advanced West. Said (1994) explains that the discourse of Orientalism allows the West to in relation to "other", in the name of the East, focus on "itself" and create its myth to legitimize its dominance over the East. According to Sardar (2008), Hollywood repeats the message of Orientalism: only the West knows and teaches authenticity to the East.

The "colonized other" issue is more prominent in the second approach than in the first one. Gayatri Spivak (1988) has underscored above all the concept of the 'subordinate' as a person who cannot speak or legitimize herself/himself and therefore, requires an elite to talk on his/her behalf and defend his/her rights.

In the thought of Homi Bhabha, identity is not a fixed essence and is produced in relation to 'others'. Bhabha regards imitation as an ambiguous (two-sided) practice that communicates two distinct psychological processes: the desire to be like 'the other' while desiring to stay away from 'the other'. During this process, the colonized desires to be more like the colonizer, however, the colonizer is aware that her/his authority or subjectivity becomes invalid and suffers from anxiety (Karimi, 2016: 58).

The study of media representation is an important aspect of cultural studies where the ‘othering’ is considered a key concept. “The important and fundamental element in representation is the production of meaning and not the transmission of pre-existing meaning”(Calvert et al., 2008: 238). According to Richard Dyer, in media representation, the media take and create a construction from different aspects of reality such as places, objects, and cultural identities. (Stafford and Branston, 2010: 106). “The spectacle of the Others’ is the central issue in the representation process; how we represent social identities significantly different from us” (Hall, 1997: 225). Indeed, what is presented as marginal (or ‘other’) is not marginal in principle; but all are the constitutive impacts of representation itself. (MacDonald, 2003: 12).

According to Hall (1997), ‘othering’ becomes conceivable during the representation process via two strategies: ‘stereotyping’ and ‘naturalization’. Stereotyping distinguishes between what is deemed natural and normal from what is considered unnatural and undesirable (Mehdizadeh, ۲۰۰۸: 20). Stereotyping classifies people according to a norm and creates 'others' from omitted people. (Hall, 1997: 259). In the process of stereotypical meaning-making, the person who is constructed as the ‘other’ is considered the enemy (Merskin, 2004: 158).

According to Dyer (2004), stereotypes are never presented in their purest form but are part of a process in which they become natural and their continuation is guaranteed. According to Barthes (1977: 6-45), myths are the dominant ideologies of our time that play a "naturalizing" role. According to Fairclough (1995), naturalization turns certain ideological portrayals into common sense. It means that they are no longer viewed as ideologies. Naturalization gives ideologies a trans-temporal and trans-spatial dimension (Ravadrad, 2013: 20).

As Barthes (1977) has noted, racist myths and ideologies promote the interests of white people. From Dyer's (1997: 12) point of view, white people set standards of humanity by which they are bound to succeed, and ‘others’ are bound to fail. Based on the aforementioned theoretical perspectives, the present paper will attempt to examine the process of ‘othering’ in two international and popular television series.

Method of Research

This study adopts a semiotic approach as its primary research method. Semiotics examines the processes through which meaning is produced and reality is represented (Chandler, 2007: 21). Specifically, the analysis is conducted using Roland Barthes’s three-level model of semiotic analysis. This model use explicit, implicit, and ideological codes to analyze the text. In the following, we will discuss the definitions of each.

Denotation refers to the relationship between the signifier and its signified. Denotation is treated as the definitional, literal, obvious, or according to the commonsense meaning of a sign.

But, semioticians treat it as a signified about which there is a relatively broad consensus. In Barthes's perspective, denotation was the first 'order of signification' (Chandler, 2007: 248).

Connotations are the social-cultural and personal relationships that enables the reader to decipher a text. For Barthes, connotation is a second 'order of signification' that uses the denotative sign (signifier and signified) as its signifier and attributes to it an additional signified. In this framework, connotation is a sign which derives from the signifier of a denotative sign (Chandler, 2007: 246).

Ideological signification more broadly, includes codes for 'encoding' and 'decoding' texts. More specifically, we may list the '-isms', such as individualism, liberalism, feminism, racism, materialism, and capitalism (Chandler, 2007: 150).

The mentioned three-level method has been utilized in this article to examine how 'others' are depicted in the *Westworld* (2016-) and *Squid Game* (2021-) TV series. The selection of *Westworld* and *Squid Game* was guided by several methodological criteria. These included the centrality of the discourse of the "Other" within their narratives, their widespread popularity and substantial critical recognition, production by internationally influential platforms (HBO and Netflix), the presence of widely recognized characters, the reception of awards and honors from prestigious international festivals, and their comparability in terms of genre and thematic concerns. In direct alignment with the research question, the construction and representation of the "Other" constitute a salient and recurring element in both series. In both series, a location is built for the wealthy to have fun and be entertained by killing humanoid robots (in *Westworld*) and humans (in *Squid Game*).

This article will look at the first three seasons of *Westworld* and the first season of *Squid Game*. In these two series, for each race/culture (as "other"), there is one (or more) main character (hero or anti-hero) who is considered as the "other" representative. In this article, appearance characteristics, dialogues, and behaviors of these representatives are examined in denotative signification. The meanings and intentions hidden in these attributes, dialogues, actions, and relationships of these representatives with others are articulated in the form of important words and phrases in connotative signification. In an ideological signification, hypertextual references are stated in the concept of 'othering' and 'other' types.

Following the theoretical framework, the 'other' is defined as someone or something that is (racially and culturally) different from the 'self' or confronts her/him. As a result, in *Westworld* and the *Squid Game*, the 'self' can be thought of as corporate owners (who are white), and 'others' can be classified into two broad categories: racial-cultural 'others' and same-race warriors. Same-race warriors are people who have a similar race as the 'self', but are

against them. In fact, the term “warrior same-race” or “combatant co-racial” refers to the “self” who confronts the center (power institution/self-righteous whites) and becomes the “other”. Based on this, ‘others’ in the two stated TV series can be classified as follows:

Table 1. ‘Self-Other’ Classification in the *Westworld* and *Squid Game*.

TV series	The Self	Racial-Cultural Others	Warrior Same-Race
<i>Westworld</i>	Investors and owners of Delos company (American and non-American white investors)	Black, Indian, Japanese, and Indian people.	Fighting white people (Dolores, Caleb, etc.)
<i>Squid Game</i>	Game investors (American and Korean investors)	North Korean, Pakistani and Christian people.	Korean fighter (Hwang Jun-ho)

All episodes of the first three seasons of *Westworld* (28 episodes) and the first season of *Squid Game* (9 episodes) were initially viewed in their entirety. Subsequently, key scenes associated with each category of the “Other,” as specified in Table 1, were selected through purposive sampling. These scenes were chosen based on their narrative significance and the cumulative presence of semiotic indicators of othering. The analytical corpus consisted of six scenes representing Black characters, two scenes depicting Native American characters, four scenes portraying East Asian characters, two scenes involving Indian characters, and two scenes featuring a White combatant from *Westworld*. Additionally, two scenes representing a North Korean figure, two scenes depicting Muslim representatives, four scenes portraying Christian representatives, and two scenes featuring a Korean combatant from *Squid Game* were subjected to semiotic analysis. In total, twenty-six scenes were analyzed. The sample size was determined based on the criterion of theoretical saturation. The descriptions and tables presented in the Findings section are organized in accordance with each category of the “Other.” In this study, the unit of analysis is the scene, while the unit of recording comprises words in the verbal system and shots in the visual system.

According to the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), the trustworthiness of the study—encompassing credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability—was ensured through multiple methodological strategies. Credibility was established through the researcher’s prolonged engagement with the research context, operationalized via sustained viewing, the minimization of misinterpretations arising from researcher intervention, and the use of corroborating sources. Transferability was enhanced by providing rich, detailed descriptions of the findings. Confirmability, understood as analytical rigor, accuracy of the

findings, and the avoidance of researcher bias, was reinforced through the systematic incorporation of visual shots and verbal dialogues. Dependability was ensured through peer debriefing, whereby the selected scenes were independently reassessed by three domain experts, whose coding corroborated the authors’ analyses and conclusions.

Results

The ‘self’ and ‘others’ in the *Westworld*

Based on the classification in Table 1, ‘Others’ and their corresponding ‘significations’ in the *Westworld* have been extracted in Tables 2 to 11.

- Blacks

Table 2. Blacks in the *Westworld*.

Other		Denotative Signification	Connotative Signification	Ideological Signification
Blacks	Bernard	<i>Westworld</i> ’s Head of the Programming Division/ A composed and authoritative host engineer who is ultimately revealed to be a host himself.	Represents the “inner other”. A subject who perceives himself as central yet is in fact a construct within a techno-colonial order. His identity oscillates between obedience to Ford and the pursuit of self-awareness.	Personifies the ideology of designed rationality promoted by the Delos Corporation, an order that glorifies intellect and logic but strategically employs them as instruments of control and subjugation.
	Maeve	A Black female host designed as a brothel madam	Symbolizes the “doubly colonized subject” (racially and sexually) who vacillates between	Embodies the myth of Regulated Freedom (or Controlled Liberty). Her revolt is strategically co-opted and

			enforced submission and the fantasy of liberation. She is the representation of the seemingly emancipated conscious woman in a male-dominated, technology-driven world.	commodified, effectively reproducing the racialized and gendered order through the illusion of progress.
	Charlotte	She is one of the middle-level managers of Delos company	Depicts the modern corporate woman, apparently authoritative and independent, yet remains ideologically subservient to the dominant managerial logic of the white, patriarchal system.	Represents the ideology of False/Symbolic Inclusion within racialized capitalism; her presence provides a veneer of symbolic equality at the top to legitimize and perpetuate underlying structures of white, male domination.

The principal roles of the blacks in this series (Bernard, Maeve, and Charlotte) rather than being decision-makers, are controlled and are the white’s helpers. Some whites also help blacks a little in their plans. Furthermore, such whites have a minor and secondary role in the story. Conversely, the whites who dominate the blacks have the leading role in the story, and the main plot is dependent on their actions and reactions. The concept of hybridity, coined by Bhabha to explain the interaction between colonizer and colonized, is obvious in the white relationship with some blacks (Bernard, Maeve, and Charlotte). It is possible to say that the symbolic sources of the story depict and formulate passive blacks alongside relatively active blacks. But

still, blacks fail in ‘personal struggle’ and according to Dyer (1997: 12) ‘they are doomed to fail’ (1997: 12). Through Roland Barthes’s notion of myth, Westworld aestheticizes racial and technological hierarchy, naturalizing the persistence of white power structure beneath the illusion of diversity, resistance, and inclusion. The table below presents the visual shots and dialogues from one scene associated with each character¹.

Table 3. Shots of Blacks in the *Westworld*.



Season 1, Episode 7

Scene description: Bernard, a Black host, brings Cullen -his partner- to the facility where the park’s robotic hosts are designed, acting on Ford’s instructions. During this encounter, Bernard discovers that he is, in fact, a host himself. He then follows Ford’s command, approaches Cullen, and kills her.

Bernard: *I’m not one. I can’t be...*

Ford: *That enough Bernard... The hosts may seem free...free...yeh and under my control.*

Cullen: *But Bernard isn’t under your control. He brought me here to show me this place.*

Ford: *No. He brought you because I asked him to. He’s been loyal for many years.*

Scene analysis: This scene exemplifies the notion of the “inner Other”. A subject (Bernard) who perceives himself as autonomous yet is, in reality, an instrument of the white technocolonial system embodied by Ford. Bernard represents technological rationality and structured order; however, that very rationality is appropriated as a mechanism of subjugation and control.

¹ Given the article’s length limitations, only one scene from each instance of otherness has been included as an example.



Season 1, Episode 10

Scene description: Maeve, a Black woman, believes that she has devised her escape plan through her own free will. Bernard reveals that the plan has, in fact, been orchestrated by the white designers who control the park’s narrative.

Maeve: *I’ve decided I’m getting out of here.*

Bernard: *That’s not your decision. Someone’s rewritten your storyline.*

Scene analysis: This scene offers a precise representation of “control through freedom.” At the denotative level, Maeve appears liberated; at the connotative level, her freedom is meticulously designed; and at the ideological level, she embodies the figure of a Black woman who seems emancipated from domination yet remains entrapped within the racial–gendered logic of the system.



Season 3, Episode 3

Scene description: Charlotte (a Black woman) realizes that she is under Serac’s (a white character’s) control. She is shown from a distant, extreme wide shot—marked with a red arrow—as a very small figure, emphasizing her isolation and vulnerability in contrast to the white characters.

Serac: *I want what you promised me... You think you’re the only one under my control? They’ve told me exactly where the key is.*

Charlotte: *Unfortunately, you know more than I do.*

Scene analysis: This scene epitomizes “false inclusion” .A system that pretends to embrace racial and gender diversity at the highest levels of power but in reality commodifies representation as a symbolic tool to legitimize white dominance. Charlotte functions as the “institutional Other”. A figure who speaks from within the structure of power only to sustain and reproduce it.

- Native Americans


Table 4. Native Americans in the *Westworld*.

Other	Denotative Signification	Connotative Signification	Ideological Signification
Native Americans (representative: Akecheta)	Akecheta lives with Indians as a tribe/ Due to his great physical power, Akecheta is chosen to be a warrior and becomes a member of a wild group called ‘Ghost nation’.	Initially, he is portrayed as “savage” and threatening. This image, however, is subsequently inverted, as attributes such as wisdom, collective memory, and love come to replace it. This transformation complicates the binary oppositions of human/machine and civilization/nature.	The Indians are engaged in the basic affairs of life such as hunting, and the whites seek to manage affairs by controlling them / Although Akecheta attains consciousness, his awakening is nevertheless framed as the narrative of a “secondary host.”

Native Americans (Indians) are represented uniformly based on clichés (in appearance, language, and behavior code) that bound them to tribalism. According to Said’s standpoint (1994), whites “by othering, give centrality to themselves”. White self-centered discourse marginalizes native americans by distinguishing the white-native american binary. This discourse induces that the priority of Native American’s existence is still to provide a living for their tribe and that they are prepared for activities such as warfare and killing. As a result, white supremacy is legitimized in some actions such as decision-making and managing.

Akecheta’s presence as a messenger within the artificial system ultimately reinforces the ideology of corporate power: even spiritual awakenings occur within the boundaries of techno-capitalist control. This is precisely the point at which, as Barthes (1977) argues, “myths function not to naturalize reality, but to naturalize ideology”.

Table 5. A shot of Native American hero in the *Westworld*.


<p>Season 2, Episode 8</p> <p>Scene description: A white female designer is shown carefully examining the body and face of Akecheta, a large, muscular Native American host, to ensure that he has been crafted to fit a role centered on warfare and violence.</p> <p>Designer: <i>The company managers want him strong but quiet, something wild, something not quite human. Probably so the guests feel better when they kill him.</i></p> <p>Scene analysis: Westworld Park remains under the control of an American corporation, and Akecheta’s knowledge ultimately operates within the limits of their programmed logic and narrative framework.</p>

- **East Asians**

Table 6. East Asians in the *Westworld*.


Other		Denotative Signification	Connotative Signification	Ideological Signification
East Asians	Japanese (Representative: Musashi)	The traditional part of Japanese culture, the samurai (Shogun World), has been chosen and the modern part of this culture has disappeared / Musashi is looking to save the dancers.	Musashi is not merely a character, but a signifier of a disciplined, aestheticized, mortal, and non-articulating East. Musashi signifies the logic of cultural interchangeability within the series, embodying compliant Others	Japanese culture is based on the aestheticization of violence and violence for the sake of violence. Elements of civilization such as pacifism and democracy are not observed in it. As a result, The Japanese world is rendered suitable only for forms of

			designed to serve Western pleasure.	entertainment-entertainment that is carefully stripped of risk.
	South Korea (Representative: Felix)	He is a technician/ Although he is talented, he works at the lower levels of Delos.	Felix embodies the familiar East Asian stereotype in Western culture: precise, intelligent, and hardworking, yet devoid of authority. He knows how the system works, but he does not own the system.	Felix represents the myth of the good Asian. This seemingly positive myth in fact naturalizes subordination: Asians are useful, but not leaders.

In *Westworld*, East Asian history and culture, despite their richness, are largely confined to violent figures (such as Musashi) and skilled technicians (such as Felix). Notably, both their violence and their technical expertise are represented as being under Western control. According to Sardar (2008), the representation of Japanese is associated with exotic cultures and heartless and robotic people. According to Said (2004: 55), cultural stereotyping in the representation of the Japanese (and other East Asians) enhances the imaginary underpinnings of the ‘mysterious East’.

Within this representational logic, the “East” is constructed not as a historical subject capable of change and rupture, but as a realm of eternal tradition and frozen time. Consequently, Eastern culture is stripped of historical agency and reduced to an aestheticized, decorative, and consumable surface, one that carries no conflict but functions instead as an object of safe and controlled experience for the Western viewer.

Table 7. Shots of East Asians in the *Westworld*.


<p>Season 2, Episode 6</p> <p>Scene description: Musashi and Tanaka, who are portrayed as enemies, engage in a violent confrontation. Musashi severs Tanaka’s arm and then gives him his own dagger, enabling Tanaka to take his own life. As the severely wounded Tanaka uses the dagger against himself, Musashi simultaneously decapitates him with a single, forceful strike. The sequence is presented in a manner that frames this moment as an instance of intensified violence within the show’s representation of Japanese culture.</p> <p>Scene analysis: Shogun World (Japanese territory) is portrayed as a traditional, frightening, and threatening world.</p>


- **Indians**

Table 8. Indians in the *Westworld*.

Other	Denotative Signification	Connotative Signification	Ideological Signification
<p>Indians (The Raj Park)</p>	<p>Indians don’t have a hero (human or robot). In the world of Raj, mainly animals such as the Bengal tiger, elephant, and peacock are observed along with Indian architecture and clothing.</p>	<p>The title “Raj” implicitly alludes to the history of British colonial rule; however, colonialism is represented not as a violent and conflictual experience, but rather as an aestheticized backdrop designed for the Western audience’s narrative consumption.</p>	<p>India is constructed not as a historical subject endowed with agency, but as an eternal cultural object. Consequently, Indian culture is stripped of conflict, politics, and the possibility of rupture, and is reduced to an aestheticized shell.</p>

The approach of the show in representing Indians is extremely reductionist and simplistic. Aligned with the theorists of the first approach of Orientalism, the border between 'self' (white American) and 'other' (Indian) is quite bold. The stereotypes that Sardar (2008) expressed about Indians such as 'wickedness, dangerousness, wrapped in tradition, brutality and cruelty' can be observed in this series. In accordance with Said's theory of Orientalism (1979), the series renders India (as part of the East) intelligible not through subjectivity and historicity, but through spectacle and visual consumption.

Table 9. Shots of Indians in the *Westworld*.


<p>Season 2, Episode 3</p> <p>Scene description: In the introductory sequence of the Indian world, animals such as peacocks, elephants, and Bengal tigers are prominently depicted. Indian culture is represented primarily through a narrow set of elements, including select animals, architectural motifs, and traditional clothing.</p> <p>Scene analysis: The selective emphasis on architecture, animals, and traditional attire reduces Indian culture to a set of familiar and stereotypical signs, detached from their historical, social, and political contexts.</p>

- **White Fighter**

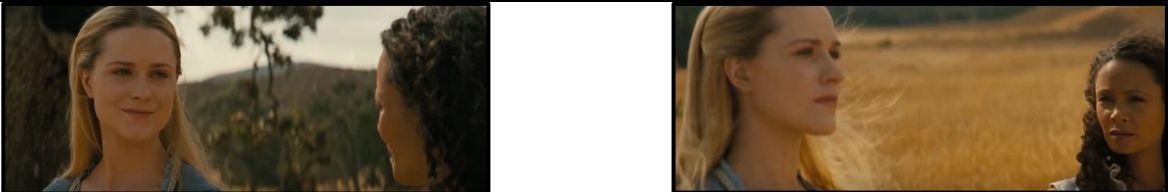
Table 10. White Fighter in the *Westworld*.

Other	Denotative Signification	Connotative Signification	Ideological Signification
White Fighter (Dolores)	She created Bernard/ She wants to save the robots. For her, reaching this goal is more important than saving Teddy, her lover/ She organizes a group with other fighting robots such as Caleb/ She manages	Dolores's power and agency are ambivalent; although she strives to dismantle the white patriarchal order, this dismantling originates from within her own white privilege. The freedom and power she possesses are, in fact, products of the very	The narrative of liberation in the modern world still derives its meaning through the existing racial logic. Even resistance against the white patriarchal order is reproduced within that very system. Dolores embodies a

	(leads) the warrior (awakened) robots.	system she rebels against.	form of emancipation born from white privilege. She is a symbol of the persistent tension between liberatory action and the continuity of power.
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According to Hall (1997), meaning is constructed in the process of representation rather than merely transmitted; thus, Dolores represents a woman who redefines her own liberation, yet in doing so, she simultaneously reproduces the discourse of white power. In line with Barthes’s (1977) analysis of myth and naturalization, Dolores is portrayed as a “myth of freedom,” as if collective emancipation could only be achieved through a white subject. This representation functions as an ideological naturalization that positions the white subject as the criterion for the movement’s legitimacy. Consequently, the same Orientalist logic that depicts the “Other” as requiring salvation by the West/whiteness is reproduced in the series: Dolores, the white woman, emerges as the savior of the hosts and the marginalized. At this level, her rebellion does not signify a negation of white centrality but rather a reaffirmation of Western authority.

Table 11. Shots of White Fighter in the *Westworld*.


<p>Season 3, Episode 8</p> <p>Scene description: Dolores (a white protagonist) speaks with Maeve (a Black protagonist) about the uprising against the creators of the theme park and attempts to persuade her to join the revolt.</p> <p>Dolores: <i>We could’ve wiped them out. Or we can tear their world apart... and hope we build something new. Something that’s actually free.</i></p> <p>Maeve: <i>And your grand plan to “free the world” was to talk one man into fighting?</i></p> <p>Dolores: <i>Not just him. You still haven’t chosen a side...</i></p> <p>Scene analysis: The scene frames Maeve as having more limited autonomy and freedom of choice compared to Dolores, emphasizing her continued structural dependence on the white characters within the narrative. In this context, the storyline assigns the leadership of the rebellious hosts to Caleb (a white man), who is explicitly positioned as the figure Dolores relies on to carry the revolt forward.</p>

The ‘self’ and ‘others’ in the *Squid Game*

Based on the classification in Table 1, ‘Others’ and their corresponding ‘significations’ in the *Squid Game* have been extracted from Table 12 to 19.


- North Koreans

Table 12. North Koreans in the *Squid Game*.

Other	Denotative Signification	Connotative Signification	Ideological Signification
North Koreans (Representative: Kang Sae-byeok)	When her family flees North Korea to South Korea, her father dies and her mother is arrested / She threatens a human trafficker to death to bring her mother to South Korea/ Kang Sae-byeok chooses Ji-Yeong (young girl) as a partner in the third and fourth stages/ She does not want anybody to know who she is or what her life story is/ She does not sleep at night because of the fear of betrayal by her teammates/ She stops Gi-hun from killing Sang-woo (but herself is killed by Sang-woo)/ Her teammates tell her that she is a North Korean spy.	She represents the “marginalized Other” within South Korean society. She is a woman who has crossed the border but remains unaccepted in the new world. This condition renders her a signifier of “identity fracture” within the structure of East Asian capitalism.	Sae-byeok’s presence within the arena embodies the tension between the ideal of freedom and the reality of survival; the promised liberation of the “free world” is achieved at the cost of the exclusion and blood of the Others. Her death ultimately consolidates this ideology: the Other may suffer and evoke empathy, yet can never claim agency or redemption for herself.

Sae-byeok is a woman suspended between two political and cultural systems, being neither fully “self” nor entirely “other.” This condition of border-existence exemplifies what Homi Bhabha (1994) conceptualizes as “in-betweenness,” or the cultural space of hybridity that resists fixed identity. From Gayatri Spivak’s (1998) perspective, Sae-byeok represents the subaltern woman, a subject silenced within power structures whose voice, even when spoken, is translated or erased by the dominant discourse. In the series, her narrative evokes empathy but never grants her the agency for structural transformation.

Table 13. A Shot of Kang Sae-byeok in the *Squid Game*.


<p>Season 1, Episode 6</p> <p>Scene description: Ji-yeong and Kang Sae-byeok, who have been paired together in several earlier rounds, face each other in the marble game. Rather than competing, they spend the round in conversation. Through their dialogue, it becomes clear that Sae-byeok still has family waiting for her outside the game, while Ji-yeong does not. In light of this contrast, the scene depicts Ji-yeong intentionally losing the match, which enables Sae-byeok to move on to the next stage.</p> <p>Ji-Yeong: <i>Why did you come here from the North?</i></p> <p>Kang Sae-byeok: <i>I thought things were good over here.</i></p> <p>Ji-Yeong: <i>And so? Were you right? Your family, are they here with you?</i></p> <p>Kang Sae-byeok: <i>Just my brother.</i></p> <p>Ji-Yeong: <i>Your parents?</i></p> <p>Kang Sae-byeok: <i>My father got shot trying to swim across the border and drowned.... Our mother she was hiding in china and got sent back once the immigration agents found her.</i></p> <p>Ji-Yeong: <i>Where is your brother now then?</i></p> <p>Kang Sae-byeok: <i>In a shelter.</i></p> <p>Scene analysis: Although Sae-byeok shows a limited willingness to help others, her primary concern lies in surviving the game and securing safety for herself and her family, namely her mother and younger brother.</p>

- **Muslims**


Table 14. ‘Muslims’ in the *Squid Game*.

Other	Denotative Signification	Connotative Signification	Ideological Signification
<p>Muslims (Representative: Ali Abdul from Pakistan)</p>	<p>His employer has not paid him in several months/ His hand is injured while working in the workshop/ He saves Gi-hun (the hero of the series) from death in the first game/ Mi-nyeo says to him: <i>‘Do you have a visa or not? I’m sure you</i></p>	<p>Although saving himself and his family is a priority for Ali Abdul, he does not violate the rights of others. Ali is</p>	<p>Ali is not only a victim of the game’s economic and moral system but also becomes a consumable signifier of the “religious Other”</p>

	<p><i>don't. You're illegally in here'!</i></p> <p>He is chosen as a strong and reliable individual to be placed at the end of the rope in the game of tug-of-war / His wife wears a hijab, but he lacks the traditional Muslim beard and mustache.</p>	<p>appreciative of everyone who assisted him. He is represented as physically strong, morally upright, and compassionate, but intellectually deficient.</p>	<p>within the age of global capitalism. His presence enables the self-contained order of the game (and the world it mirrors) to reaffirm its moral and racial boundaries.</p>
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Ali Abdul's narrative is rooted in the stereotype that Stuart Hall (1997) calls stereotypical representation: a fixed image of the "good Eastern Other" created to appeal to the audience's moral sensibilities. From Bhabha's (1994) point of view, Ali exists in a state of in-betweenness, situated between an Islamic–South Asian cultural sphere and East Asian modernity. He is neither completely an insider nor entirely an outsider. This cultural liminality constructs a form of hybridity that opens a possibility for resistance within subjugation, yet due to existing power structures, this resistance ultimately remains unrealized. From Said's (1979) perspective, Ali is a product of Orientalist discourse, a Muslim "Other" defined by the host culture through labels such as "uncivilized," "naive," and "emotional." Even in its sympathy toward Ali, the series unconsciously reproduces the Orientalist gaze, presenting him as morally virtuous but lacking modern strategic rationality.

Table 15. Shots of Ali Abdul in the *Squid Game*.


<p>Season 1, Episode 6</p> <p>Scene description: Sang-woo begins to lag behind Ali in the marble game. To avoid being eliminated, he proposes a deceptive plan and ultimately obtains Ali's marbles through this fabricated strategy.</p> <p>Sang-woo: <i>God, I'm so sorry, Ali. I know you won't cheat. But I can't die this way, I beg you. They'll kill my family. If I don't get out of here.</i></p> <p>Ali: <i>Sorry, Sang-woo. No. I'm so sorry. I have to think of my family.</i></p>

Sang-woo: *Hey, Ali. Hey. Hey, come on, if you help me, then there's away that both of us could live....listen, Ali, please. Trust me, help me and I'll make sure we get out of here. Huh?*

Ali: *Okay. what do we do?*

Scene analysis: Ali places excessive trust in Sang-woo, a well-educated South Korean, and is ultimately betrayed and killed by him. His fall as a “moral victim” serves to preserve the series’ ideological order, where obedient morality is represented instead of resistant morality.

- **Christians**

Table 16. ‘Christians’ in the *Squid Game*.

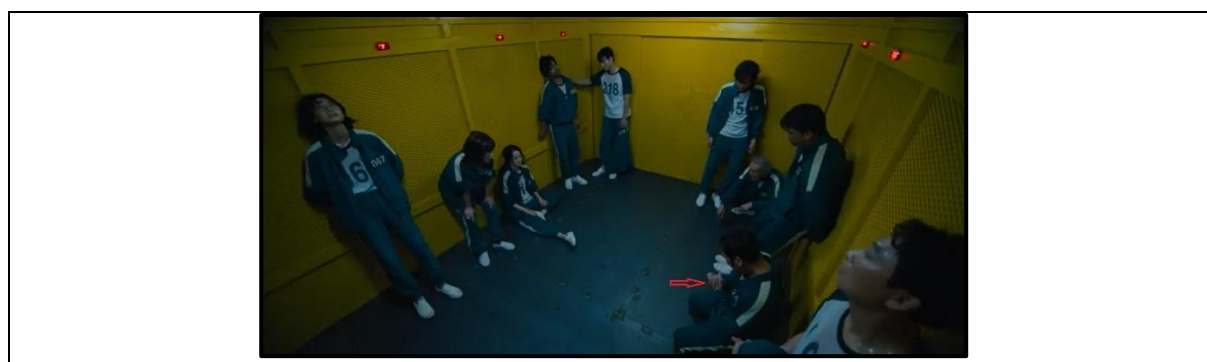
Other		Denotative Signification	Connotative Signification		Ideological Signification
The Christians	Christian priest	He calls the opponents of praying wretched and misguided/ He tells his teammates to kill the ‘weaker’ team members/ He considers men superior to women and does not group with women/ In the fifth stage, he throws a person down from the glass and thinks that it was God’s will.	He prays but performs no genuine act of salvation. His faith remains purely ritualistic and ineffective.	The priest’s prayers, the father’s violence, and the young missionary’s slogan-like phrases each embody a tension between faith and moral action. The Christian	The Christians in the series are not subjects of redemption but symbolic instruments reinforcing the ideological order, an order that replaces resistant ethics with obedient morality and transforms the failure of faith into an aestheticized sentiment of compassion.
	Ji-Yeong’s father	He pleads to God for forgiveness after striking his wife (Ji-Yeong’s mother) and hurting his daughter.	He embodies the image of religious violence and hypocrisy, representing the failure of the family institution and the myth of the sacred father.	characters in the game show no inclination to confront the ‘Selfs’ (the managers of the game as the core of power).	

	<p>Young missionary</p>	<p>A young missionary who (in the last episode) invites people to Christianity on the side of the street. After opening Gi-hun's closed mouth, immediately encourages him to Christianity.</p>	<p>He possesses a fervent but naive and mechanical faith. He repeats religious slogans.</p>		
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The majority of stereotypes in the representation of others are connected to Christian characters. Following Hall's (1997) perspective on stereotyping, Christianity is encoded through stereotypical and contradictory figures (the saint, the fanatic, the naïve believer) in order to produce a meaning that is simultaneously familiar and consumable for a global audience. This level corresponds to what Hall calls the "fixity of meaning", which refers to the stabilization of meaning through the repetitive image of faith as "useful but ineffective". Following Bhabha (1994), it can be argued that in this show, the deep connection of Christianity with 'negative stereotypes make discriminatory forms and rejection of Christians to be considered appropriate'.

Said (1979) shows that Western discourse has consistently framed Christian faith as a sign of "civilization" positioned against the "uncivilized Other." In *Squid Game*, however, this relationship is reversed: the Eastern world depicts Christians not as saviors but as fallen subjects of Western modernity. This "orientalist reversal" follows the same logic identified by Said; only the roles of center and periphery have been exchanged.

Table 17. A shot of Christian priest in the *Squid Game*.



Scene description: Following the tug-of-war match, a Christian pastor offers a prayer of gratitude, thanking God for what he interprets as divine assistance in his team’s victory over the opposing group. Ji-yeong objects to this act of prayer and questions the pastor’s attribution of the outcome to divine intervention.

Ji-yeong: *Hey! Who are you praying to right now? To God? Do you think you’re alive thanks to God? You’re still breathing and moving that tongue of yours. Thanks to that old man. And that guy over there who pulled out that awesome trick last-minute. So if you’re going to thank anyone, thank them.*

Christian pastor: *You poor lost lamb. Can’t you hear the cries of those who were nailed to the cross today? We lived to see another day thanks to their blood and sacrifice. On behalf of all us sinners, I am thanking the Lord for his decision and their sacrifice, and saying a prayer.*

Ji-yeong: *Bullshit. You killed them yourself.*

Scene analysis: The Christian pastor regards himself (and his teammates) as sinners for the death of their opponents in the tug-of-war game and prays for God’s forgiveness of their sins. In effect, Christianity is transformed into a neutralized myth; signs such as prayer no longer possess the power of redemption but become cultural ornaments that rationalize moral failure.

- **Korean fighter**


Table 18. Korean fighter in the *Squid Game*.

Other	Denotative Signification	Connotative Signification	Ideological Signification
Korean fighter (Hwang Jun-ho)	A police officer who sneaks into the game as a guard to find his missing brother/ His brother donated one of his kidneys to him and he is trying to compensate for it/ He understands that the competition has been going on since 1989 and that his brother won the game prize in 2015.	Jun-ho represents the formal system of justice that confronts structural violence. He becomes a symbol of the resistant Other within the Korean order, an individual who understands and exposes the mechanisms of domination from within the system itself.	Eastern resistance does not operate merely from a position of passivity; rather, it critically and internally questions its own logic. Within this framework, the Game becomes a spatial arena where the East emerges not as a victim but as the exposé of power, though the degree of its success remains veiled in ambiguity.

From Hall’s (1997) perspective, Jun-ho embodies a discourse of multiple representations: he is simultaneously a product of the power system and its critic. Implicitly, he points to the crisis of Korean identity entrapped between Western capitalism and national nativism.

According to Bhabha’s (1994) theory of mimicry and ambivalence, Jun-ho moves within a system that appears Western and modern yet is internally conflicted. By imitating the Western mission of law enforcement, he performs a form of resistant mimicry that dismantles the boundary between authority and obedience. This “in-between space” is precisely where meaning is produced. From Spivak’s (1988) standpoint, Jun-ho can be read as an instance of the “speaking subaltern.” He is a subject who speaks from within the structure of power, yet his voice remains unheard. His death or disappearance at the end of the narrative symbolizes the silencing of resistance against capital and state power. This silence is not a mark of defeat but an exposure of the limits of the discourse of power, where the system, unable to listen to its own critic, resorts to erasing him.

Table 19. A shot of Hwang Jun-ho and his brother (Front Man) in the *Squid Game*.

	
<p>Scene description: Hwang Jun-ho infiltrates the island with the aim of relaying its confidential information to the police. As his investigation continues, he discovers that the Front Man supervising the games is his brother. The brother attempts to apprehend Jun-ho, but the confrontation intensifies and results in him firing a shot. Jun-ho subsequently falls from the cliff into the surrounding ocean.</p> <p>Hwang Jun-ho: <i>Who the hell...are you?</i> The Front Man removes his mask. Hwang Jun-ho: <i>In-ho, brother!</i> Front Man: <i>Let’s go.</i> Hwang Jun-ho: <i>In-ho, why?</i></p> <p>Scene analysis: The character of Hwang Jun-ho serves as a vehicle for articulating the internal contradictions of South Korean society, a society entangled among law, capital, and human morality. In <i>Squid Game</i>, his role as a policeman and his connection to the Front Man are not merely elements of familial drama but metaphors for the ideological rupture between legitimate order and systemic violence. His representation compels the audience to confront not a mere officer but the human face of justice, one that within capitalist structures is condemned to silence and erasure.</p>	

Discussion and Conclusion

A comparative analysis of *Westworld* and *Squid Game* reveals that both series represent mechanisms of *Othering* within hierarchical systems of power, though they embody this mechanism through two distinct models: continuum-based *Othering* in *Westworld* and center–

periphery Othering in *Squid Game*. These two forms not only expose the internal logic of Western dominance and capitalist modernity but also delineate the position of the “Other” within the global discourse of difference, as conceptualized by Edward Said (1978) in his theory of *Orientalism*.

In *Westworld*, the structure of Othering unfolds along a gradual and hierarchical continuum in which “whiteness” occupies the center, and Black, Indigenous, Japanese, and Indian groups are defined by their varying distances from this center. This configuration mirrors the Orientalist logic through which the West defines and reconstructs itself via differentiation from the Other. However, unlike classical Orientalism, *Westworld* transforms this hierarchy into a stage of resistance: “Others,” led by Maeve (a Black woman) and especially Dolores (a White woman), gradually move from objecthood toward subjectivity. In light of Hall’s theory of representation, these figures rearticulate their identities against the dominant discourse; following Bhabha, their condition of *ambivalence* destabilizes racial stereotypes; and through Spivak’s notion of the *subaltern*, the rebellion of the hosts becomes a mechanism for moving from margin to center, from silence to enunciation.

In contrast, *Squid Game* operates through the center–periphery model wherein the “Self” corresponds to the global capitalist elite—represented in the narrative by Western white figures—while the “Others” occupy the roles of the indebted, the workers, and the subjugated, all situated at an evenly distant periphery from the center. Here, Othering arises not primarily through race but through spatial and economic segregation. This reproduces the same Orientalist formula identified by Said: the West remains the center, and the East along with the Global South stay on the margins. Within this structure, the “Others” never access the core of power; their resistance remains individual and constrained. Only *Hwang Jun-ho* momentarily approaches Spivak’s idea of the subaltern intellectual, yet his silencing signifies the systemic impossibility of being heard within the totalizing framework of Western capitalism.

As Roland Barthes highlights in *Mythologies*, both *Westworld* and *Squid Game* illustrate how discourses of power construct seemingly “natural” meanings to legitimize domination. By subverting these innocent-seeming myths, the two works compel viewers to reread signs and uncover the hidden ideological strata embedded in images and narratives.

In this article, the integration of perspectives from five key theorists -Hall, Bhabha, Spivak, Said, and Barthes- created a cohesive analytical framework:

- Representation, in Hall’s formulation, constitutes the foundation of power relations.
- Ambivalence, in Bhabha’s sense, destabilizes these relations.
- The subaltern’s silence, in Spivak’s analysis, marks the existential cost of resistance.
- Myth, in Barthes’s approach, exposes how domination naturalizes itself.
- Finally, Orientalism, in Said’s view, reveals the global and political dimensions of this process.

In sum, both series demonstrate that the modern capitalist world depends on the continual production of Others, whether through technological codes or economic mechanisms. In both cases, the "Self" derives meaning only through the silencing and erasure of the "Other." The shared moral and political crisis of these narratives lies precisely here: in a world where domination hides beneath the veil of representation, the voice of the Other becomes both the site of rupture and the measure of humanity.

From theoretical and practical standpoints, the findings of this study contribute to expanding the scope of postcolonial, media, and cultural studies. Theoretically, the comparison underscores that the mechanism of Othering is no longer confined to territorial colonialism but is reproduced in the forms of technological and capitalist coloniality. Consequently, classical theories of Orientalism and subalternity require reinterpretation within the context of digital capitalism and new media. Analytically, the proposed "continuum" and "center-periphery" models offer conceptual tools for identifying structures of power, identity, and resistance in contemporary audiovisual productions. Culturally and socially, these findings highlight the necessity of recovering marginalized voices and rethinking relations of domination in today's global narratives. This suggests that media can function not only as a reproducer of hegemonic discourses but also as a site for emancipatory expression and the emergence of critical subjectivity in the contemporary world.

Future Research Suggestions

The findings of this comparative analysis open several avenues for future scholarly inquiry, essential for deepening our understanding of ideological structures in global media.

1. Transnational Media Production and "Othering":

It is recommended that Netflix-produced series from different national contexts be examined through the analytical lens of othering. This focus should explore how centralized streaming platforms influence the local cultural representation of marginalized groups, thereby illuminating universalizing tendencies in the depiction of difference across diverse geographical settings.

2. Audience Reception and Ideological Decoding:

It is suggested that future research investigate audience reception -both in Iran and in other cultural contexts -with respect to systems of othering embedded in American television series. Mixed-methods research is necessary to decode how non-Western audiences perceive the hierarchical positioning of the Self and the Other, assessing whether the ideological messaging of Western superiority is negotiated or affirmed.

3. Temporal Stability of Ideological Mechanisms:

It is further recommended that the more recent seasons of *Westworld* and *Squid Game* be analyzed and that their findings be systematically compared with the results of the present study. Such an investigation would determine the temporal stability of the established mechanisms of othering and identify whether evolving narratives introduce novel forms of ideological complexity or solidify the initial power configurations.

4. Cross-Platform Examination of Cultural Products:

It is recommended that the modes of othering across a range of American cultural products - including feature films, television series, video games, and animated productions- be examined comparatively. This broad-scope analysis is vital for documenting the extent to which the underlying ideological apparatus of othering transcends media-specific narrative conventions and maintains a structural consistency across platforms.

5. The Economy of Othering and Production Logistics:

Additionally, it is recommended that future studies investigate the intersection between the mechanisms of othering and the logistics of media production, specifically focusing on budgetary allocations, casting decisions, and executive creative control. This approach would move beyond textual analysis to establish a direct link between the political economy of Hollywood and its subsidiaries, and the systematic perpetuation of representational hierarchies that continually center the Western/White subject.

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