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Ethnic and Racial Other in Contemporary South Korean Dramas

Abstract. Every year, the flow of migrants and foreign tourists arriving in South Korea is growing, and the proportion of foreigners appearing in the Korean media is increasing accordingly. However, the acceptance of multiculturalism in Korean society is dilatory since the country has long developed as a monoethnic state. The historical ethnic homogeneity of Korean society contributes to the distortion of how Koreans perceive migrants and foreigners, which is why the image of racial and ethnic minorities is often surrounded by a number of stereotypes that affect the way they are perceived in real life. Existing works on this topic are devoted to the representation of migrants, foreigners, and non-ethnic Koreans in various types of media content, but the ethnic scene of contemporary Korean dramas remains largely unexplored. At the same time, dramas occupy one of the most significant places in the cultural life of the Korean people: they serve as an agent of socialization and as a tool for

the formation of values and stereotypes in Korean society. The otherness of ethnic and racial Others is constructed through various strategies of alienation, including depersonification, fragmentation, fetishization, exoticization, pathologization, and homogenization. In this study, we explore the ethnoscape of modern South Korean dramas, highlight such strategies, and identify the main features of the representation of racial and ethnic minorities in them. For these purposes, we analyze the two dramas—*Descendants of the Sun* (2016) and *Itaewon Class* (2020)—for the representation of the ethnic and racial Other, and identify the general representation strategies. This work also seeks to detect the dynamics of changes in the representation of ethnic minorities in South Korean media.

Keywords: racial and ethnic minorities, representation, the Other, Korean drama, multiculturalism, colonial mentality

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Этнический и расовый Другой в современных южнокорейских драмах

Аннотация. С каждым годом поток мигрантов и иностранных туристов, прибывающих в Южную Корею, растет, и соответственно увеличивается доля иностранцев, появляющихся в корейских СМИ. Однако принятие ценностей мультикультурализма в обществе происходит постепенно в связи с тем, что страна долгое время развивалась как моноэтническое государство. Историческая этническая однородность корейского общества способствует искажению представления корейцев о мигрантах и иностранцах, из-за чего образ расовых и этнических меньшинств часто окружен рядом стереотипов, влияющих на их восприятие в реальной жизни. Существующие работы по этой теме посвящены изучению репрезентации мигрантов, иностранцев и неэтнических корейцев в различных типах медиаконтента, но этническая сцена современных корейских драм остается в значительной степени неизученной, в то время как драмы занимают одно из важнейших мест в культурной жизни корейского народа, являясь агентом социализации и выступая в качестве инструмента для формирования ценностей и стереотипов в корейском обществе. Конструирование инаковости этнических и расовых Других происходит через различные стратегии отчуждения, среди которых деперсонификация, фрагментация, фетишизация, экзотизация, патологизация и гомогенизация. Это исследование направлено на изучение этнического состава современных южнокорейских драм, выделение таких стратегий, выявление основных особенностей репрезентации в них расовых и этнических меньшинств, а также на отслеживание динамики изменения в репрезентации в медиасфере Южной Кореи. В исследовании были проанализированы две южнокорейские драмы — «Потомки солнца» (2016) и «Итхэвон класс» (2020) — на предмет репрезентации этнического и расового Другого, на их основе были выявлены общие стратегии репрезентации. Выбранные драмы имеют непосредственную ценность для данного исследования, так как они транслировались на основных корейских телеканалах, KBS и JTBS, и крупном глобальном потоковом сервисе Netflix, а также имели высокий зрительский рейтинг, следовательно, в значительном степени отражали интересы аудитории.

Ключевые слова: расовые и этнические меньшинства, репрезентация, Другой, южнокорейские драмы, мультикультурализм, колониальный менталитет

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INTRODUCTION

The number of foreigners coming to South Korea to live and work is increasing every year, and as a result, the discourse of multiculturalism is gaining momentum. South Korea strives to achieve multicultural tolerance through various political and media channels, but the representation of foreigners in Korean media is often standardized and stereotyped. Even though South Korea still has a long way to go before becoming a multinational country, positive examples of the representation of the ethnic and racial Other are already appearing in the media.

This study examines the ethnic scene of Korean dramas by analyzing the representation of racial and ethnic minorities and the characteristics attributed to them.

The research problem lies in the necessity to study the image of the ethnic and racial Other in modern South Korean dramas, since most of the existing studies do not cover this genre, and the representation of the Other is understudied.

The object of our analysis is South Korean dramas which include characters representing ethnic and racial Others. For this study, data obtained from the analysis of two Korean dramas, *Itaewon Class* (2020) and *Descendants of the Sun* (2016), will be used. The two dramas were chosen as they have characters from ethnic and national minorities that are of interest for this study. They also aired on major Korean TV channels such as KBS2 and JTBS and global streaming services such as Netflix. *Itaewon Class* ranked 3rd among the viewership ratings of all JTBC dramas and won Best Drama Series at the Asian Television Awards in 2021¹, while *Descendants of the Sun* became the most popular television show in South Korea with 30% of the country's audience share and 16 billion viewings². Therefore, these dramas reflect the interests of the audience. Dramas belong to different genres, which allows us to study whether the representation of the ethnic and racial Other depends on the genre of the series.

The aim of the study is to identify the peculiarities of the representation of the ethnic and racial Other in contemporary South Korean dramas.

The objectives of the study include the following steps:

—to study different approaches to the concept of the Other and to identify strategies for constructing the otherness of minorities;

¹ CNA lifestyle (2022, March 25). *Popular K-drama Itaewon Class is getting a Japanese remake*. Retrieved May 25, 2022, from <https://cnalifestyle.channelnewsasia.com/entertainment/itaewon-class-japanese-remake-roppongi-class-307966>

² Forbes (2016, April 05). *Korean Drama Descendants of the Sun Breaks Records Thanks to Chinese Investments*. Retrieved May 25, 2022, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnkang/2016/04/05/korean-drama-descendants-of-the-sun-breaks-records-thanks-to-chinese-investments/?sh=3f3bb1a019ee>

- to identify the features of the discourse of multiculturalism in South Korea and study the phenomena of Korean ethnic nationalism and colonial mentality;
- to review existing studies related to the representation of ethnic groups and races in Korean media and identify the main patterns of such representation;
- to analyze *Descendants of the Sun* (2016) and *Itaewon Class* (2020) series for the representation of the ethnic and racial Other, to identify common representation strategies based on them.

The methods of critical discourse analysis, visual, semiotic, and narrative analysis will be used to identify patterns of representation of racial and ethnic Other in contemporary Korean dramas.

ETHNOS, RACE, AND IMAGE OF THE OTHER IN MEDIA CULTURE: THEORETICAL ASPECT THE CONCEPT OF THE OTHER IN WESTERN CULTURE

Other is one of the key concepts in several disciplines. The new philosophical theories of postmodernism and feminism mainly set themselves the task of deconstructing the binary opposition between the Self and the Other and rejecting the position of the Other as a subordinate. J. Deleuze formulated the principle of nomadism, which justifies the equality of all forms of life and abandons the traditional opposition between the central and the marginal, and due to this the Other ceases to be a marginal element (Deleuze & Guattari, 1977). Thanks to the new critical, postmodern studies, the value of otherness and diversity of Others is acknowledged, and more attention is paid to the representation of groups of Others (Markina, 2017, p. 60).

Otherness is one of the main defining properties of the Other. Otherness is the result of a process in which a norm-embodying dominant group whose identity is valued constructs a group of Others whose difference is presented as a disadvantage, and which is often devalued and discriminated. The construction of otherness (this process is also called othering) consists in creating a hierarchy—dividing people into two groups: us and strangers, Others (Staszak, 2009, p. 44). The asymmetry of power relations plays a key role in the process of othering, since only the dominant group can impose the value of its own identity, devalue otherness and discriminate.

Stereotyping is another mechanism of alienation, in which a certain group is associated only with a small number of selected characteristics, while all other

real characteristics and features are ignored. In the case of pathological stereotyping, the world is presented as a set of “stable binary oppositions” (Markina, 2016, p. 152), and otherness is perceived negatively. Distinctive features of pathological stereotyping are stigmatization of the Other, the lack of critical consideration of the stereotype, and strong belief in its objectivity. Markina identifies the following forms of pathological stereotyping (Markina, 2016, p. 152):

- depersonalification—objectification, inability to treat the Other as a person;

- fragmentation—paying attention to certain parts of the Other’s body, features of appearance that “allegedly indicate the obviousness of its otherness” (Markina, 2016, p. 152);

- fetishization—endowing people with new properties and value meaning, can come in the form of idealization or the creation of a cult, but the emphasis is still placed on otherness, complete obscurity;

- exoticization—emphasizing any unusual features, the perception of the practices and rituals of Others as a manifestation of uncivilization;

- pathologization—considering the difference of the Other from the norm adopted in the dominant group as a pathology;

- homogenization—generalization of the properties of a group of Others, non-perception of the individuality and personal qualities of an individual.

Such strategies serve to further alienate the Others from the dominant group, help perpetuate erroneous opinions in the public mind and exacerbate discrimination.

So, the phenomenon of the Other is truly complex and dynamic, the changes taking place in social life constantly pose new tasks for scientists and dictate the need to revise old ideas.

KOREAN ETHNIC NATIONALISM

Before considering the concept of the Other in the context of South Korean modernity, along with the concept of multiculturalism, it is necessary to realize that these phenomena are only beginning to take root in the political and social discourse of South Korea. Only in the '90s of the 20th century, the South Korean government begins to realize that multiculturalism is becoming part of the country’s modern reality due to such factors as the considerable influx of migrants and foreigners living in the country on a permanent basis, a significant increase in the number of international marriages, etc. The late introduction of multiculturalism

in South Korea is explained by the long history of ethnic nationalism, which determined the establishment of the country (Yang, 2012, p. 252).

For this study, we will consider the history of the development of ethnic nationalism in the 20th century in South Korea since it was this period that largely determined the establishment of South Korea as an independent state but, at the same time, stagnated the process of multiculturalism penetration in liberated South Korea. According to Shin Gi Wook, Korean nationalism is ethnic since it reflects the idea of the unity of the nation by origin or “by blood,” which for the Korean people is still an important element when defining a nation (Shin, 2006, pp. 6–7).

One of the main reasons for the rise of nationalism in South Korea was Japanese colonization. In the middle of the 20th century, ethnic nationalism acted as a mechanism for the liberation and rallying of the Korean people. In the '60s, the nation was focused on resisting external interference and preventing a repetition of the colonial Vietnam scenario for Korea. Strengthening nationalism for the Korean people also became a way to protect themselves from the influence of Western European imperialism.

DISCOURSE OF MULTICULTURALISM

For a long time, Korean society was homogeneous: monolingual and monoethnic, which has heavily affected the acceptance of multiculturalism today. The first serious steps toward multiculturalism were taken only in the '00s when the country faced a rapid influx in the number of foreign migrant workers.

That prompted the government to set policy on integration and introduce a new support program in 2006 that offered foreigners Korean language training, a study of the culture and history of Korea, and suggested a smoother merging into Korean society. The assessment of the program turned out to be ambiguous, on the one hand, the program integrated representatives of intercultural marriages and their children into Korean realities and helped create cultural awareness. However, such an integration program had significant drawbacks, namely the continuation of a monocultural society policy and the lack of representation of other cultures. This type of integration program normalizes the suppression of the interests and rights of foreign citizens to a greater extent, putting the sovereignty of the country at the forefront (Jung, 2020, pp. 8–11).

Another issue was the fact that all state support was mainly directed to interethnic marriages and not to migrant workers or other foreigners, the percentage of which was also constantly growing.

In 2013, the Second Basic Plan for Immigration Policy significantly increased the percentage of social payments for families and children of migrants. By 2017, the number of gender equality programs was on the rise, including school education programs designed to raise children's awareness of other cultures (Draudt, 2016, p. 12).

“COLONIAL MENTALITY” OF SOUTH KOREAN SOCIETY

Still, in the multicultural landscape of Korean society, there is such a notion as a *colonial mentality*, suggesting a sense of ethnic or cultural inferiority experienced by the peoples of the former colonial countries (David & Okazaki, 2006, p. 241). This is a special kind of racism based on the glorification of white people and the oppression of people of color (excluding Koreans). Koreans in the “trichotomy” of racial sequence occupy the middle position: white people > Koreans > people of color. This trichotomy is a product of the dichotomous racism (white > people of color) inherited by Korean society from Western and European countries. For a long time in America, people were divided into “whites” and “others.” Africans, Hispanics, and Asians traditionally belonged to the group of people with “other” skin color, while white skin was considered the norm, and white people belonged to the highest dominant class compared to all other races (Downing, 2014). This phenomenon is called imperialist racism, which was spread by Western and European countries with the aim of colonizing third-world countries and establishing national domination.

Even though both whites and people of color are foreigners to Korean society, mostly foreigners with darker skin face racial discrimination. According to Jung Yun Koo's research on the impact of multicultural media on audiences and the perception of ethnic and racial Others by Koreans, it was found that, in general, Koreans perceived foreigners from the US and Europe more favorably than other foreigners (Jung, 2019, p. 16).

MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF ETHNIC GROUPS AND RACES: A REVIEW OF STUDIES

The popularization of Korean multiculturalism in 2008–2013 during the implementation of the Second Basic Plan for Immigration Policy left an imprint on the representation of foreigners in the Korean media. Foremost it was reflected in

the racial and ethnic stereotyping of minorities. Since government policy to support minorities was mainly aimed at foreign wives and intercultural marriages, the exclusion of male migrants and the oppression of the migrant working class in the media were even more pronounced.

Oh Kyung-Seok examines the representation of foreigners in media and the features of Korean multiculturalism based on the government's commercials which were released from 2004 to 2007.

The main purpose of these videos was to create a basis for social integration and increase the competitiveness of the nation by demonstrating its openness. The researcher identifies that one of the methods of representation used in the video is the method of "good minority." The videos show white immigrants in a more positive way than non-whites. Most of the featured foreigners work in research laboratories, foreign language courses, representing "good immigration," while migrant workers, who make up a large proportion of the number of foreigners in Korea, are marginalized. In the videos, married foreign women are shown cooking Korean national dishes and taking care of children, representing femininity and safety. The advertisement is pervaded with a sense of cultural superiority (Oh, 2007, p. 30).

Based on the analysis of the videos, Oh Kyung-Seok concludes that the Korean media is characterized by a contradictory combination of a demonstration of the multicultural environment and the ideology of an integrated nation (Oh, 2007, pp. 30–31).

In their study, Kim Chohee and Kim Dohyeon conducted a content analysis of Korean multicultural television programs produced from 2003 to 2016 to find out how the representation of foreigners and migrants differs depending on race and type of migration (Kim & Kim, 2018).

Researchers point out that Korean "colonial mentality" is supported and reinforced by the media. Both the sense of belonging to the "upper" white world and the sense of superiority gained from seeing people of color as objects of sympathy are satisfying to the Korean audience.

The results of the analysis showed that the coefficient of representation of white people was more than twice as high as the coefficient of representation of people of color. Low-skilled migrant workers also were heavily underrepresented (Kim & Kim, 2018, p. 339).

The researchers conclude that there is a clear imbalance in the representation of races in Korean multicultural programs. The use of migrants of color in programs where their images evoke sympathy and sadness leads to a conclusion that the representation of minorities in multicultural programs only reinforces racism and provokes discrimination.

Kim Sookyung notes that in the era of globalization, racism in the media has taken more subtle forms. In her research, she analyzed articles about migrants in

Korean newspapers CSN and HKR from 1990 to 2009 to find out in what form racism is present in them (Kim, 2012, pp. 658–660).

A detailed discourse analysis revealed the following features of representation. First, negative stereotyping—migrants were described as victims of physical violence and discrimination. They also were objectified, it is expressed in the use of such phrases as “were bought, were brought” in relation to them, for example, in one of the columns foreign wives were called “imported brides.”

However, in recent years progressive newspapers have shifted their focus to the issue of violation of the rights of foreigners and discrimination against foreigners by native Koreans (Rhee, 2016, pp. 1–4).

Thus, based on the analysis of research data, it can be concluded that, despite the existence of examples of adequate representation, the Korean media space is characterized by the use of stereotyping tactics such as objectification, victimization, and representation by the good minority method. Also, different races and different groups of ethnic and racial Others are unequally represented. White foreigners are represented in greater numbers and more positively than people of color due to the impact of the colonial mentality, while migrant workers are marginalized. Foreign wives and students as representatives of “good migration” are shown in a positive way.

ETHNIC AND RACIAL OTHER IN SOUTH KOREAN DRAMAS: AN ANALYSIS OF REPRESENTATION, MILITARY DRAMA SERIES *DESCENDANTS OF THE SUN* (2016)

The South Korean drama *Descendants of the Sun*, positioned as a military-political blockbuster with elements of melodrama, was broadcast both on Korean TV channel KBS2 and on Netflix and was sent to 32 countries where it received high viewership ratings. The story reflects the events in the fictional country of Uruk (우르크), the prototype of which is Iraq. The drama features characters of different ethnicities and nationalities, distinguishing it from average Korean dramas. However, the representation of the Other is still ambiguous: there are both positive examples, as well as negative and stereotypical ones. All the main characters of the drama are ethnic Koreans, the characters representing the ethnic and racial Other have episodic or minor roles. Based on characteristics such as plot involvement and screen time, David Argus, as the only minor character representing an ethnic and racial Other, is the most significant one and, at the same time, is an antagonist.

According to the plot, Argus is a former major in the US Army who left the service for the sake of the underground arms trade and the illegal exploitation of

child labor. Despite the high military rank and American origin of the character, the representation is deliberately negative. Argus, played by American actor, has no accent, but the character's lines are clichéd and broadcast the stereotypical image of the American mafia.

Another crucial aspect of representation is the fact that the actor playing Argus is an ethnic Korean. Therefore, considering all the above, we can conclude that only characters of Korean origin can take the main and minor roles in the story (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. David Argus, former US Army Major, ep. 3³

The following significant characters representing the ethnic and racial Other are the Russian Korean nurse Cho Woo Ri and Russian waitress Valentine, who have episodic roles in the drama. Both have clichéd images of Russian gangsters (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Cho Woo Ri, armed with a gun, meets her husband, ep. 5⁴

Although clichéd, the representation is rather positive, with both women being admired for their skills and connections. However, the characters have a signifi-

³ See the image source: <https://www.iv.ru/watch/potomki-solntsa> (20.03.2021).

⁴ See the image source: <https://www.iv.ru/watch/potomki-solntsa> (23.03.2021).

cant difference in the social hierarchy. Cho Woo Ri, being the doctor's wife, has a high social status. At the same time, the actress who played the role of a nurse is a Korean who does not speak Russian.

Valentine, on the other hand, is played by white actress Ariane Desgagnes-Leclerc. Valentine has many lines in Russian and sits significantly lower in the social hierarchy, being a waitress at a local bar. This distribution of roles repeats the previously mentioned ranking of the main and minor roles depending on the ethnicity of the actors. In addition to the problem of social hierarchy, the representation of the Russian waitress Valentine contains elements of sexualization. According to the plot, Valentine works in a bar, wears rather provocative outfits, and is somehow related to prostitution.

The image of a Russian prostitute working in a bar is very persistent and clichéd among the Korean public to this day. In the '90s, during the era of the economic crisis, and the activities of criminal organizations in Russia, the flow of women (from the CIS countries) who came to Seoul in search of work increased significantly, which led to the spread of Russian prostitution in Korea. Since the Koreans had a rather vague idea of the nationalities of the CIS countries' representatives, every Russian-speaking European woman with white skin was regarded as Russian. Over time, the share of Russian prostitution in Korea has been significantly reduced, but stereotypical images are still alive in the minds of many Koreans and are often found in South Korean media products.

Elements of the Russian prostitute image are present in Valentine's character; the sexualization of the character is visible in some episodic scenes: soldiers often come to the bar to stare at the waitress (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Valentine serves drinks at the bar, ep. 5⁵

The drama features several Arabic characters who have different role hierarchies in the story. The highest in the hierarchy ranks the head of the Arab League,

⁵ See the image source: <https://www.ivi.ru/watch/potomki-solntsa> (10.04.2021).

Mubarat, who, according to the plot, requires emergency hospitalization. The main conflict of the president's arrival at the military hospital is revealed when the president's bodyguards declare that only an Arab doctor can treat the head of an Arab state. In this case, the representation is reliable, as it accurately reflects Muslim traditions. At the same time, the religious views of Arab characters are not condemned by Korean characters: Korean doctors respect the cultural traditions of a Muslim country and try to negotiate peacefully. The images of Arab characters are not discredited nor presented in a satirical manner.

In the drama, many episodic roles are given to the characters of Uruk locals. The two characters who have the most screen time are children from nearby villages, Fatima, and the local boy Blackie. Fatima is an orphan who grew up as a slave to former major Argus. According to Fatima, most local children live in poverty and have no further life prospects: "Boys become criminals, girls end up in the sex-trade." Indeed, in the drama, all local children are shown dirty and starving (Fig. 4).

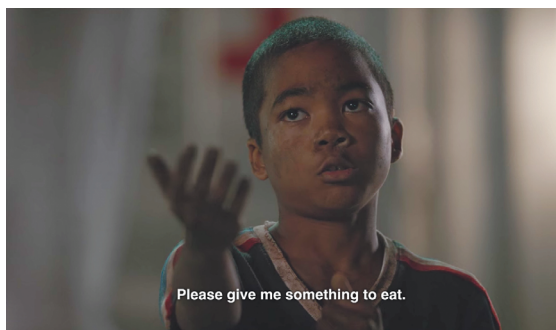


Fig. 4. Local boy Blackie asks doctors for food, ep. 3⁶

While white foreigners are admired by Koreans, foreigners with darker skin are often sympathetic. Throughout the story, the fate of poor Arab children worries Dr. Kang: she brings them food and even decides to pay for Fatima's studies. Despite the fact that the image of poor Muslim children is extremely clichéd and refers to pathological stereotyping, the representation is not completely negative. Fatima clearly shows her individuality: she is expressive and enterprising. The main characters, Dr. Kang Mo Yeon and Capitan Yoo Si Jin take care of the girl throughout the development of the plot and even risk their lives to save her in military operations (Fig. 5).

⁶ See the image source: <https://www.ivi.ru/watch/potomki-solntsa> (28.03.2021).



Fig. 5. Captain Yoo Si Jin rescues Fatima after she was kidnapped by drug dealers, ep. 10⁷

To sum it up, *Descendants of the Sun* can be regarded as a landmark drama of the last decade as it is a multinational project featuring more than five national groups and one of the few media products in Korean entertainment that promotes the ideas of multiculturalism, equality of all races, religions, and nationalities.

Korean characters in the series interact with characters of other races and ethnicities without singling themselves out as a dominant group. The representation is still problematic due to the clichéd images, the presence of pathological stereotyping (homogenization) and the sexualization of characters. The need for Korean characters to be the main roles is still too apparent, as well as leaving episodic roles for characters representing a racial and ethnic Other. Overall, *Descendants of the Sun* as a drama with progressive ideas about equality and tolerance for multi-ethnicity is a significant step for South Korea as a homogeneous nation on the path to a multicultural society.

MELODRAMATIC SERIES *ITAEWON CLASS* (2020)

Itaewon Class was a huge success both in Korea and abroad, and received one of the highest viewership ratings of 2020. This drama realistically shows issues such as discrimination against racial minorities and the LGBT community, the difficulties of social adaptation after imprisonment, and describes the social inequality and class gap that exists in Korean society. The plot revolves around Park Sae Roy—a young man whose father was murdered and who was unfairly sent to prison. He wants to take revenge on his offenders and to create a new successful restaurant chain.

⁷ See the image source: <https://www.ivi.ru/watch/potomki-solntsa> (29.03.2021).

The main setting of the drama is Itaewon, an area of Seoul where many foreigners live. In the second episode, there is a Halloween scene in Itaewon which shows a lot of people of different races and nationalities spending time together. Restaurants with flags of different countries appear in the frame, and people of different nationalities take photos together. One of the characters in the drama says, “Itaewon has many beautiful buildings and many people from all over the world, it is a place where different cultures coexist freely, there is real freedom here” (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Halloween in Itaewon, ep. 2 of *Itaewon class*⁸

In general, Itaewon acts as a multicultural community where people of different nationalities and cultures can coexist peacefully, foreigners are shown as happy people who enjoy life. In addition, in the series, they perform noble deeds, show compassion and are worthy members of society.

A significant figure for the plot is the character named Kim Toni, a child of a mixed marriage between a Korean and a Guinean. He dresses rather flamboyantly and wears dreadlocks. His unusual image sets him apart from the rest (Fig. 7). He is kind and sociable person; he often smiles and tries to keep a positive attitude.



Fig. 7. Kim Toni's first appearance on *Itaewon Class*, ep. 6⁹

⁸ See the image source: <https://www.kinopoisk.ru/series/1256366/> (03.04.2021).

⁹ See the image source: <https://www.kinopoisk.ru/series/1256366/> (08.04.2021).

Kim Toni comes in for an interview to get a job as a kitchen assistant. The owner and manager of the restaurant start to speak English when they see a black man, but Toni answers them in good Korean and reveals that he is Korean by father. The manager hires him because they need a person who speaks English. However, it soon turns out that Toni does not speak English. One of the employees says: "Judging by his appearance, he should know." This incident indicates the clichéd notions of black people that Koreans have. There is a stereotype that all black people should know English. In this case, such a strategy of stereotyping as homogenization takes place, all the properties of the group of Others are generalized.

In the eighth episode, all the restaurant staff go to a nightclub, but the security guard does not let Toni in, because Arabs and Africans are not allowed. Toni says he is a Korean, but the guard calls him names for no reason. One of the restaurant's employees says that he is not Korean because he is dark-skinned, and Toni is very offended. The head of the restaurant reprimands her and the next day covers the walls of the clubs with graffiti saying "racists" and "shame of the nation," expressing his protest against racism and discrimination. Toni tries to find his father to confirm his nationality and to prove that he really is a Korean. He is going through an ethnic identity crisis. He wants to feel the sense of belonging to the community, has positive ethnic feelings (in the 7th episode, he uses evaluative lexis such as "loyal," "brave," and "noble" to describe the Korean people), but society rejects him.

The employees of the restaurant become his friends; they make decisions regarding the business together. They also help him to get a visa, and thanks to their help Toni manages to find his grandmother. Toni finds his place in society, he has a relative, a good job, friends, and now he does not have to worry about a visa and can apply for citizenship.

In the final episode, we see that Toni became the operating manager of a chain of bars. The new social status is reflected in his clothes. He begins to dress in a more classical manner in accordance with his status and position.

Thus, foreigners appear in *Itaewon Class* in episodic roles, conveying an atmosphere of freedom and open interaction between people of different cultures, which corresponds to the image of an open, multicultural country promoted by South Korea. Despite being a minor character, Kim Toni has a vivid storyline, he is a well-developed character with his own personal story and development.

Itaewon Class, referring to the topic of multiculturalism, does not follow the strategy of the Korean media, considering mainly cultural diversity and tolerance, but reveals the problems of racism and discrimination using the example of Toni. All the situations that happened to Toni affect the rest of the characters and help them to change their minds about ethnic identity. In addition, the show's creators eschew traditional Korean media representational patterns, such as portraying the Others as helpless victims and displaying them from a position of empathy and

superiority. Toni has a whole range of positive qualities, he works and communicates with ethnic Koreans on an equal footing, takes charge of his own destiny and achieves success in his professional activities, learning a new language and moving up the career ladder. Thus, he occupies a high position in the social hierarchy, rather than the standard low position given to ethnic and racial minorities by the Korean media. *Itaewon Class* is a great example of the representation of ethnic and racial minorities, in which the victimization perspective is replaced by the perspective of empowerment, and the minorities themselves are seen not as victims, but as agents of change.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that ethnic and racial characteristics of the Others in case of each drama are shown in different ways and the range of personal characteristics of the characters is rather wide. In the dramas studied, the ethnic and racial characteristics of the Other are shown mainly through the appearance of the characters, their language, values, and lifestyle. In the last decade, there has been a significant improvement in the representation of ethnic and racial Others over time. By the 2020s, representation is more in line with the ideals of a multicultural state, and cases of negative stereotyping in dramas have significantly decreased. For example, *Descendants of the Sun*, being a mid-decade drama, represents the cinematography of South Korea of an earlier time, where a high social status is mostly held by white foreigners. However, by the end of the decade, this trend has started to change. In *Itaewon Class*, black characters are at the top of the social hierarchy as well. In the dramas studied, there is no definite pattern in the distribution of roles among characters representing ethnic and racial Others—there were secondary, episodic characters, and antagonists. The most common form of pathological stereotyping in the representation of racial and ethnic minorities is homogenization; a lot of characters in dramas had characteristics which corresponded to the clichéd images of these groups that exist in the Korean media. In both dramas, Korean protagonists strive to oppose racism and discrimination, embodying the exemplary image of a person who embraces multiculturalism and all forms of diversity. Representation depended on the genre only in dramas with political and historical contexts (i.e., military series). The study has shown that *Descendants of the Sun* series utilizes representation by the “good minority” method and shows the ideas of cultural superiority of the Korean nation (ethnic Koreans occupy all the fundamental roles in the plot). These are the same features that were identified in previous studies of Korean media. However, *Itaewon Class* is strikingly different from the first drama, as

it does not use the mechanisms of pathological stereotyping and broadcasts the image of the racial Other from the position of equality.

Even though strategies of pathological stereotyping and other strategies of alienating racial and ethnic Others are still found in South Korean dramas, in general, some dramas of the last decade demonstrate an adequate representation that does not carry discrimination.

The results of this paper can contribute to further studying of how the Other is represented in various media. This study can generally highlight the problem of stereotyping ethnic and racial minorities in Asian countries, as well as contribute to the eradication of intolerance and discrimination. Also, it may show different results when looking at a different set of dramas, which provides opportunities for future research.

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Olga Zolotaiko collected data and wrote the text for the sections: Korean ethnic nationalism, Discourse of multiculturalism, "Colonial mentality" of South Korean society, and Military drama series *Descendants of the Sun* (2016).

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