



Why bloodthirsty monsters? : A multimodal analysis of incorporation of the supernatural to symbolize racism and othering in webtoons

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Abstract - This paper examines the implications of considering supernatural incorporated into the webtoons as metaphorically addressing racism and inclusivity. Based on analysis of two webtoon series *Days of Hana* (2016) and *Orange Marmalade* (2019) created by Seokwoo, the current study uses qualitative multimodal and textual analysis situated within a theoretical framework based on the Critical Race Theory. The framework adapts the notions of "historically rationalized racism" and the treatment of the minority group as "subhumans" at the hands of the majority and combines them with some basic tenants of racism related to race as a social construct underpinned by intersectionality. Findings in the current paper suggest that racism found in the two focal webtoon series has been historically rationalized and socially constructed. The supernatural beings in the webtoons are treated as less than humans on account of the differences they have in their physical attributes or biological mechanisms. From this theoretical perspective, the webtoons attempt to unravel notions of racial superiority based on superficial differences and hint at inclusivity by creating plotlines that expose the evils of racism.

Keywords: racism, supernatural, webtoons, multimodality, textual analysis, critical race theory

I. INTRODUCTION

Webtoons are stories told in the form of comics that are published and read exclusively on the Internet (Norin, 2018). Webtoon is a newly coined term created through the combination of the words 'web' and 'cartoon'. It is a popular South Korean medium of entertainment. It started appealing to a geographically diverse audience through the translations of the Webtoons available in several languages. According to Norin (2018), webtoons did not become as widely admired in South Korea as they are today until the 1980s. In the 1980s, webtoons artists started including serious issues related to the status of South Korea as a democracy in their webtoons, whereas they had previously been merely imitating the Japanese manga culture (Norin, 2018). Webtoons differ from traditional Japanese manga, printed Korean manhwa, and graphic novels in their medium of publication.

The Webtoons that will be discussed in this paper are *Orange Marmalade* and *Days of Hana* created by artist Seokwoo and published on Line Webtoon, a popular mobile application for webcomics. *Orange Marmalade*, completed in 2015, is a love story situated in a world where vampires and humans exist at the same time. Almost two hundred years before the events of this story unfold, humans' fear of vampires had escalated to the extent that vampires were hunted to the near extinction of their species. Following this, a peace treaty was signed between the human population and vampires whereby the vampires agreed to stop drinking human blood in exchange for safety from the massacre. Even though vampires were accepted into society, they were still hated for being "different". The protagonist of the Webtoon, a vampire girl named Mari Baek is struggling to hide her identity from the human individuals that she goes to school with for fear of being bullied and ridiculed. *Days of Hana*, completed in 2019, is also a love story, this time between a werewolf and the human girl who is supposed to be his "owner". The world in *Days of Hana*, like *Orange Marmalade*, presents a hybrid society, consisting of humans and werewolves. Because of some of the overt differences in terms of physical appearance that sets the werewolves apart from the humans, they are treated in a discriminatory manner.

The current article views the supernatural phenomenon of werewolves existing among humans as two races coexisting in an imbalanced sociocultural structure. The study examines how these supernatural elements are incorporated in the Webtoons as a metaphor for racism and the struggles of minorities to be

recognized as human beings. The worlds created in both these Webtoons present a divided world. Strong binaries operate within this society that determines a “privileged” section and an “unprivileged” section. The human population enjoys belonging to the privileged section, whereas the supernatural population suffers from discrimination and exploitation on account of their being different. The paper explores the emerging trend in webtoons of using the supernatural as a metaphor for the “other” in society and highlights themes of racism and discrimination. The theoretical framework that informs our analysis in the current articles draws on Critical Race Theory derived from William (1988) and Delgado and Stefancic (2017).

The overarching research questions center on how the supernatural is used in the selected webtoons to highlight racism; how discrimination and otherization are rationalized by characters in the two stories; and what is the relevance of such comic webtoons for real-world issues racism in the present era? The supernatural has been used extensively in research literature mostly as a gothic symbol in the fantasy, mystery, and thriller genres. It has even been used extensively as an element of star-crossed love in teenage romances like *Twilight* in recent years. This study aims to establish the use of supernatural as symbolic of the struggles of racial minorities to acquire racial equality, an aspect of this genre that has not received enough attention. For the present study only superficial visual elements, for example, the overt differences in the physical appearances of the supernatural population that set them apart from the human population will be considered as multimodal data to understand how these lead to discrimination.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Webtoons, comics, graphic novels, *manga*, *manhwa* are all different terms that are used for similar narratives which combine the visual arts and language for storytelling. Stein and Thon (2013) trace the use of such hybrid storytelling narratives to very early times during which they were used to convey simple messages to the less literate. Where previously these narratives were considered inferior to other traditional literary forms, they are now being appreciated as a new and popular literary form in the twenty-first century. The mediums of storytelling that use both visual and linguistic means can express human experiences in a way that is more profound than other means of storytelling. The representation of different races and ethnic identities in these narratives helps the readers belonging to diverse races in identifying more with the presented stories and characters (Becnel and Moeller, 2018).

Hillary Chute (2008) defines comics as ‘a hybrid word-and-image form in which two narrative tracks, one verbal and one visual, register temporality spatially (p. 452).’ Norin (2018) explains that the term *manhwa* is used as an umbrella term that encompasses all forms of comics and storytelling through visual arts and written text in South Korea. The researcher identifies the point of differentiation between Webtoons and other similar forms of narratives in the medium of their publication and dissemination to the general public. Webtoons are published and read exclusively on the Internet through websites on which they are uploaded by their creators. These rose in popularity in South Korea as compared to printed *manhwa* due to the increased prices of paper during the IMF crisis in the early 2000s. Moreover, as South Korea was at the forefront of the technological revolution through the internet, investors found uploading Webtoons on the web a cheaper alternative to printed *manhwa* (Norin, 2018). The constant evolution in the genre of webtoons being published online has been traced by HeekYoung Cho (2016) and how it entails the incorporation of not only new artistic styles but also novel cultural practices as it is a form of storytelling that incorporates various modes of expression, from words and images to sounds and music. The writer-reader communication gap has also been significantly reduced through this medium of storytelling (Cho, 2016). The writers receive immediate feedback from readers and the readers also have a direct link to the writers that they follow and admire.

Sadokierski (2010) disagrees with the assigning of the marketing term “gimmick” to the visual aspect of hybrid narratives, which in her research is defined as an additional selling point attached to a product usually as an incentive to lend it more purchasing power. Rather the visual aspect is an “integral literary device” that adds to meaning-making in these kinds of narratives. The researcher believes that art in hybrid narratives adds to the aesthetic, experience, and literary value of the work and must not be dismissed as “supplementary”. Sadokierski also explores the ambiguity of the visual expression, contending that it needs to be supported by written language or text for clarity and/or to pin down its meaning but maintains that the notion of superiority that was previously attached to the written word

over images is now shifting. McCloud (1994) recognizes the potential of the hybrid medium in its versatility in meaning-making that can be understood very widely.

Delgado and Stefancic (2017) contend that Critical Race Theory (henceforth CRT was established in the 1970s as an ideology concerned with the legal domain of the US judicial system, as a way of procuring justice for people of color that they were often denied in Post-Civil War America. It has since perforated into other disciplines and fields of humanities where it is used to create a better understanding of race. Broadly speaking, CRT endeavors to eradicate racial inequalities, social discrimination, xenophobia, class discrimination, sexism, and hateful stereotyping of certain communities (Hartlep, 2009). According to McCoy and Rodricks (2015), CRT provides a framework to challenge existing notions of race and the power differences in societies to create an atmosphere of social change. CRT addresses any form of discrimination perpetrated against people based on their religion, gender, sexuality, and class (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). The intersection between race, gender, religion, sexuality, class and how these factors put people at a disadvantage in a particular sociocultural setting is known as intersectionality (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017).

Delgado and Stefancic (2017) identify the primary tenet of CRT in the acceptance of race as 'ordinary', and not as an aberration. They assert that the concept of race is a social construct and that the power struggle between races only exists to reiterate a predefined system that works to favor a certain section of the society. For example, Delgado and Stefancic explain the concept of the black-white binary through which the society divides into two sections: the powerful racist population and the powerless minority victims of this racism. The population in power assumes the role of the white binary and all the minority groups being subjected to racism are grouped into the binary of black. This allows for the complex concept of racism to be simplified to the extent of undermining the struggles of other minorities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Zeus Leonardo (2009) notes how this notion of binaries is too "dichotomizing", not inclusive enough of the struggles of non-black minorities and that it can cause crevices in the foundations of solidarity between different communities that are victims of the same social system. The world of the Webtoons this study will be analyzing creates a similar power struggle. The present research considers the supernatural population as members of a race separate from humans, who are struggling against such racial constraints.

Derrick Bell (1980) finds that the people in power do not endorse racial equality because they view it as a phenomenon that would deprive them of their power and create an imbalance in society, ultimately undermining their privileged position. He proposes the theory of interest convergence by asserting that racial equality is fulfilled only if it is in the interest of those in power. Segregation of minorities would only be forsaken if it serves some purpose of the powerful and not because it is immoral to treat another human being as inferior (Bell, 1980). Even if a change in the racial system is made driven by the interests of the powerful majority, the majority still protests due to their fear of being put on equal footing with a population they have despised and used as slaves (Bell, 1980).

Delgado and Stefancic (2017) identify two different schools of thought that have varying views on racism. The realist school of thought acknowledges the allocation of racial hierarchies as a means of creating divisions in society. These divisions are based on the privileged and the non-privileged which determine the section of society that is to reap all the benefits. The other school of thought is called materialists. These are the people who diminish the humanity of the people they are exploiting to feel better about themselves or to justify the fact that they are exploiting them. Similarly, the idea of meritocracy allows the people in power to keep a guilt-free conscience by relegating small, insignificant amounts of power to the people that they oppress to be praised for it (Hartlep, 2009).

Delgado and Stefancic (2017) expose the notion of color blindness, which dictates that the law not take implications of race into account while making decisions, as a farce that would oppress minorities further instead of liberating them from the shackles of tyranny. Patricia Williams (1988), while referring to the master-slave power dynamics between the black and white communities of America as written in the slave laws, notes how the oppression of the blacks at the hands of white bourgeois has been historically rationalized. Members of the black community have been portrayed as "simple, above animal subhumans" with inadequate willpowers and personalities, who needed to be dominated by the cultured white population for their survival. Williams (1988) references the dominance of the market theory in the white narratives that view the members of the black community as being "simple-minded and able-bodied" that contribute to the market without actively taking part in its intellectual concerns, thus depriving them of the full potential that they present as human beings and confining them to the status of simple economic

actors. These notions of Patricia Williams also contribute to the research framework adapted for the present research.

Lehtinen (2018) notes that the stereotypical roles of the villains (usually in the forms of evil monsters) in storytelling narratives that were previously assigned to supernatural beings like vampires and werewolves are now being assigned to human characters who suffer from psychological disturbances or illnesses. The present research, on the other hand, endeavors to establish the newly emerging traditions in Webtoons whereby the supernatural are portrayed as creatures closer to human beings battling the stigmas of inequality due to the differences that they overtly have. Veera Lehtinen (2018) also discusses the increasing trends of making the antagonists charismatic, beautiful people who commit horrible crimes against humanity behind closed doors as opposed to the inclinations of the writers of the past who attributed evilness to a person by creating a visible marker of said evilness in their person, in the form of fangs or horns, etc. This research ventures to establish that the visual markers of differentiation on the Webtoon characters serve only as instruments of “otherization” as opposed to marking them as evil, making them prone to racial inequality and hate crimes.

Papo (2018) creates a parallel between the house-elves in the wizarding world of Harry Potter by J.K Rowling and the enslavement of people belonging to a lower class or a different race in different civilizations of the world where people have been “treated as property to achieve other people’s goals”. She then links it to the extensive colonization done by the British Empire after they abolish slavery in Medieval times to “own people”. In similar research work, Jenny Korhonen (2016) finds similarities between the reign of Voldemort in *Harry Potter* and the oppression of Hitler in Nazi Germany, both despots who targeted people based on their identities; blood status in case of the wizarding world of Harry Potter, and religious affiliations in the case of Hitler’s Nazi Germany. Additionally, Korhonen (2016) fits the house-elves to the Post-colonial notion of the subaltern due to their being members of the lowest strata of the society in the wizarding world on account of their being non-human. The house-elves are owned by old, rich pure-blood families and thus become a symbol of social prestige or a marker of belonging to an elite class which is very similar to a part of the present research which discusses the werewolves being treated as “pets” kept by wealthy families as a symbol of their elevated position in the society.

III. METHODOLOGY

Textual analysis of the webtoons is carried out as it is a hybrid form of literature that incorporates images as well as the written text. According to Kuckartz (2014), “text analysis is interested in the text itself, notably based on the text in its entirety” (p. ?). The analysis has been done after close-reading of the text. The process of close-reading that was followed was prescribed by Kain (1988). The text has been first read closely, annotated, and highlighted. As the second step in the process, patterns have been identified in the highlighted texts. The note-taking technique has also been used to filter the parts of the webtoon that show discrimination against the supernatural population.

Conceptual Framework

The Webtoons *Orange Marmalade* and *Days of Hana* are the primary texts for analysis. The conceptual framework that has formed the foundations of analysis is based on CRTAs adapted from two important works. The framework adapts William’s notions of historically rationalized racism and the treatment of the minority group as “subhumans” at the hands of the majority as presented in her work *On Being the Object of Property* (1988). The framework also borrows from Delgado and Stefancic’s (2017) basic tenants of racism and incorporates their ideas of race as a social construct and intersectionality.

A visual representation of the conceptual framework used for textual analysis in the current article is presented below:

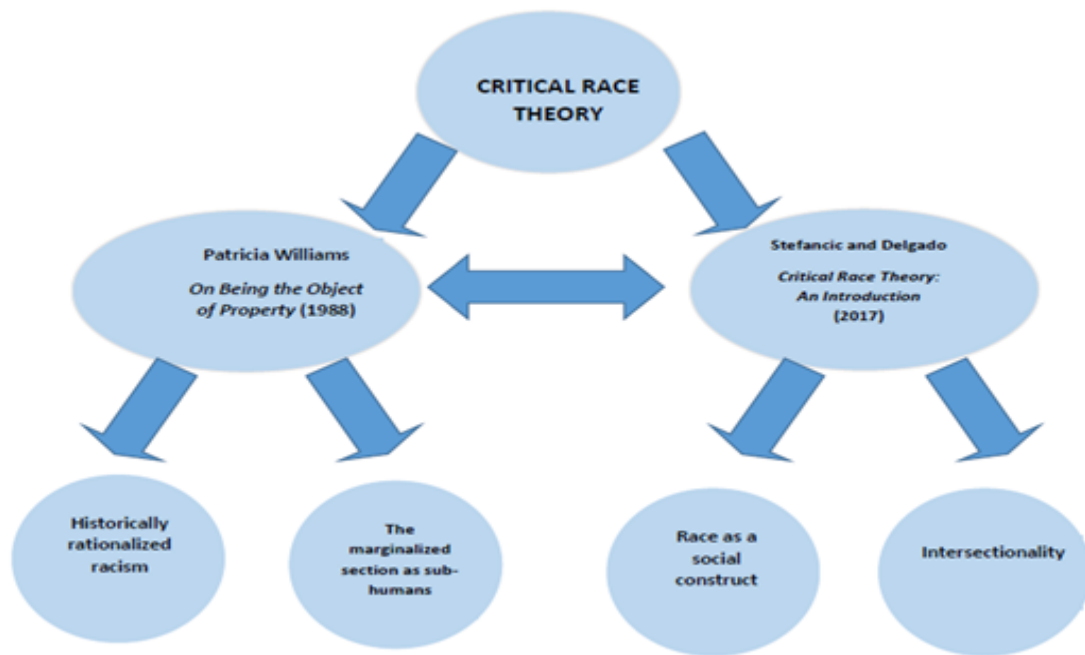


Figure 1: Conceptual framework based on CRT

IV. ANALYSIS

The Webtoons selected for study in this research are both creations of the same artist. The analysis will be divided into four sections, each corresponding to one of the tenets from the conceptual framework. The supernatural population represents the marginalized minority that is the victim of racism whereas the human population represents the powerful majority who are the perpetrators of racism in the world of the webtoons.

Historically rationalized racism

In *Days of Hana*, the werewolf population has historically been treated as inferior to human beings. They were blamed for an epidemic that broke out in the world, thirty years before the events of the story presented in the webtoon unfold, as a result of which they “had to be culled” which points to a probable genocide that the community had to face. The truth of the reason for this extreme measure is disputed. There are frequent mentions of the blaming of the werewolves as a farce because the humans could not discover the real reason for the epidemic. They blamed the werewolf population to hide their shortcomings.

It is revealed in episode 31 of *Days of Hana* that werewolves have historically been considered the slaves of humans. But as the times progressed, a change came over and political correctness was required in the dealings of humans with werewolves, so they were labeled “pets” as opposed to “slaves”. It is revealed in episode 2 that they are still little better than slaves, being forced to leave their own families once they find an “owner” (Episode 2) and then dedicating their lives to the pleasure and comfort of their owners, only to be abandoned when they reached old age or have lost their charms. In episode 14, after Haru and Hook have been beaten up by a group of human boys while trying to save another weaker werewolf Choco from their torturous ways, Haru says to Hook, “Why should we have to be like this? Why do we just have to take everything?” Because werewolves have historically been discriminated against, the developed social order is difficult to resist.

In *Orange Marmalade*, the genocide against vampires started about three hundred years before the main plot of the story starts. The vampires were killed almost “to the brink of extinction” since they previously attacked humans. Then a peace treaty was signed between the humans and the vampires and the vampires agreed to stop drinking the blood of humans if they could live with humans peacefully once again (*Orange Marmalade*, Episode 1). But because they drank blood as a source of nutrition, the vampires

have always been treated as outsiders, ridiculed by the humans who are as afraid of them as they are disgusted.

In the present day and age, the vampires have agreed to only consume pig blood which they discovered to be an alternative to human blood. As a result of not having their prime means of nourishment, the present-day vampires are not as strong as the ones in the past who drank human blood. The character of Shiho rebels against this. He has been treated badly by humans and so he plans his revenge on them by only drinking human blood.

Marginalized Section of Society Treated as Sub-humans

In the world of the webtoon *Days of Hana* the humans “own” the werewolves. They are treated as “pets” instead of being treated as “people” (*Days of Hana*, Episode 4). The human narrative presents the werewolf community as irrational and highly emotional creatures who need human beings to function as a civilized part of society in the very first episode of *Days of Hana*. They are made to wear collars around their necks so that “their emotions can be controlled” through electric shock mechanisms built into the collars (*Days of Hana*, Episode 1). According to the narratives that the humans present, the werewolves cannot take off their collars because it represents a “promise” to their owners when it is only a technique to subjugate them and keep them under control (*Days of Hana*, Episode 3). Also mentioned in the first episode of the webtoon is that a werewolf attacked a human because the human was harassing his owner, playing on the notion of werewolves being violent and simple-minded creatures that need to be controlled. When Haru and Hook try to look for summer jobs as a requirement for their school credit hours, they are turned away from most of the shops because the shop owners believe that they are “too stupid” or that they might scare away customers (*Days of Hana*, Episode 53). They finally get a job at a restaurant where a werewolf, Lucky, is already working. It is revealed that people usually “leave” the restaurant when they find out that the food has been prepared by Lucky.

Werewolves are often compared to animals (*Days of Hana*, Episode 2), most prominently dogs, because of their pointed ears, and the collars that they are forced to wear. Humans who do not have werewolves of their own openly gawk at them in public as though they were “zoo animals” (*Days of Hana*, Episode 4) yet these werewolves possess the full range of human emotions and are often disconcerted by such behavior. In episode 12 of *Days of Hana*, a group of human boys, belonging to the powerful majority, decide to play a joke and steal the controller for Choco’s collar, who is a small differently-abled werewolf who goes to school with Hana and Haru. They activate the electric mechanism of the collar, torturing Choco for their fun. When one of the boys beats him subsequently, he calls him slurs like “dog”, “vermin” and “slave”. In the third episode of *Days of Hana*, a pair of girls converse with Hana about the cost of a werewolf’s “maintenance” and ask if they could survive on “dog food”, which is demeaning to Haru.

The feelings and emotions of the werewolves are completely disregarded. Even when they have lived with humans for years on end, they are not considered a part of the “family” (*Days of Hana*, Episode 34). They are punished cruelly for disobeying their masters. One of the most racist characters in the story, Jeff, regularly chains up his werewolf, Hook, and whips him bloody simply because he is a sadist who enjoys gaining control of a situation by inflicting pain on others. The pronoun used by most humans to refer to werewolves is “it”, which effectively deprives them of their humanity. They are treated as commodities and are frequently “abandoned” for not being of use to their masters if they are handicapped or become too old to work. Choco is encouraged by a group of human boys torturing him to leave the human family he lives with because he is a “burden” to them. After all, one of his legs has been amputated in an accident (Episode 13).

It is revealed in episode 46 of *Days of Hana* that an underground betting ring is secretly operating where werewolves are forced to fight to the death. It is highly exclusive and only very rich members from the aristocracy even know about its existence. In the very last match that Hook fights, he and his opponent are given serums to turn them into “vicious, bloodthirsty monsters” (*Days of Hana*, Episode 87). The fighting pit and all the atrocities against the werewolf community that it symbolizes finally becomes a tipping point for the werewolves. The werewolves take back the control that has been taken away from them by actually becoming the ferocious animals that they are forced to emulate, and carnage eventually ensues.

The human community in *Orange Marmalade* is very similarly prejudiced against vampires. In the first episode of the webtoon, girls at the school talk about expelling vampires from the world because they are “blood-drinking monsters”. Girls from Mari’s class talk about vampires with such hatred that Mari throws up the human food that she has been forcing herself to consume (*Orange Marmalade*, Episode 29). When

blood is found near a construction site at Mari's school, the students automatically assume that it is there because a vampire attacked a human being and then ran off (*Orange Marmalade*, Episode 39), when it's there because Mari got injured while trying to rescue Suri from the falling construction material.

Race as a social construct

The social hierarchy that exists in the world of *Days of Hana* has been created by the human population. The werewolves are deemed an unprivileged part of the society, owned by humans as a pet. Even though the werewolves are physically stronger than the humans, they are trapped in a system where they are oppressed. In episode 96 of *Days of Hana*, while arguing with Hana's father about why it is considered taboo for a werewolf and a human to be together, Miho says, "You're the one who made that rule, not God. You didn't want to treat werewolves as equals. You just want to keep us under your control", referring towards the continued subjugation of the werewolves at the hands of humans. In episode 53, Miho expresses her hope for a future where werewolves "might be treated as people", but it admits that it sounds too "far-fetched" due to the social order. The werewolves are deprived of education to keep them simple-minded and to prevent them from being able to be independent. They are not taught to read or write, they cannot handle money, and cannot even move from one place to another without their owners. Hana's family is considered "unusual" because the werewolves that live with them have been taught how to read and write (Episode 53).

When they are allowed to go to school, they are only taught skills appropriate for house help, like baking and flower arrangement. They are made to call the humans who own them their "masters". Haru calls Hana by her name instead of calling her "master", and her father "dad" which is met with the incredulity with the other werewolves and werewolf owners that they meet at school. The lives of the werewolves revolve around "pleasing their masters" (Episode 5). Jeff's werewolf, Hook, refuses to believe ill of his master even when he is forced to fight to the death in an underground fighting pit, saying that his master only makes him fight when he needs to "relieve some stress" (Episode 47). The werewolves are thus kept compliant by constantly relegating them to the lowest rung of the social ladder and making them believe in their inferiority.

The human notions regarding the status of werewolves are so pervasive that there is a certain amount of internalized self-hatred seen within the werewolf community. They usually refer to themselves as "inferior" compared to the human community. The human supremacy is so far propagated that in episode 23 of *Days of Hana*, werewolf Lammy says, "If there's a God in this world, it's probably my master". Similarly, in *Orange Marmalade*, Mari Baek hates herself and her family for being vampires. Talking with Suri about herself, Mari says, "I'm a monster. The monster that you hate from the bottom of your guts" (*Orange Marmalade*, Episode 40). She has spent her childhood being despised by the human community, especially human children her age and that is what causes such a strong emotion to surface in her.

It is considered "taboo" for werewolves and humans to be intimate. It is mentioned in *Days of Hana*, that it was tradition for the werewolf to be "ousted or shot" if they were found to have been in a relationship with a human. What happens to a human in this equation is not mentioned (Episode 3). Hana is subjected to bullying and ridicule from her school fellows when a rumour starts circulating that she has been intimate with Haru. Hana's father, a vocal advocate for the werewolves to be treated like humans, abandons Haru when he discovers these rumours.

Even after a bill has been passed by the Senate, giving werewolves some rights under the law, society is slow to accept them as people. They are allowed by law to go out without their owners, purchase things and use public transport, but none of these changes is practically observed. Haru, Hook, and Lucky go to buy meat but are turned away because the shopkeepers say that they "do not sell to werewolves" (*Days of Hana*, Episode 60). The werewolves are forced to acknowledge that even though they have been given rights under the law, "the world wasn't ready to change". Towards the end, the society does try to change, as they begin to recognize the similarities between werewolves and humans rather than solely dwelling on the differences.

In a similar vein, in *Orange Marmalade*, the society defines a strict line between vampires and humans despite there being no overt physical differences between the vampires and humans. The vampire Baek family lives by pretending to be humans, for fear of being outcasted and move every time someone discovers their truth. They are constantly conflicted about who to reveal their identities to for fear of being discriminated against. Mari is shocked when her aunt Nabi reveals that her friends know about her being a vampire. She also reveals that even though they were shocked at first, they eventually begin to see

her as a “human like them” (Episode 9). Mari, on the other hand, is reluctant of being friends with humans because she is afraid of being subjected to their “ridicule”. As a child, Mari experiences her human friends being estranged from her on discovering that she is a vampire. As a result, she keeps “distancing” herself, and spending most of her time alone (Episode 14).

One of the most interesting voices of change in the webtoon is Ms. Oh, who is married to a vampire. Her son Jaemin refuses to talk to her and even live with her because her husband is a vampire, and eventually falls in love with Mari, not knowing that she is a vampire. Suri is one of the most vocal anti-vampire characters at the beginning of the webtoon. After Mari saves her life in an accident, she undergoes a character transformation. Seeing Mari bleeding profusely on being hit by a few falling construction instruments makes Suri realize that she hurts and bleeds just like humans do. Suri recognizes Mari’s humanity and becomes one of Mari’s most trusted friends.

Intersectionality

The supernatural community in both the selected webtoons is put at a disadvantage due to their being “different” than the human community. While their emotions and most physical features remain human, the “werewolf” or the “vampire” part of their identities categorizes them as the unprivileged class. In *Days of Hana*, the werewolves look different from the humans. They have pointed ears and protruding canines. They can also transform into partial or complete wolves, yet they possess the full spectrum of human emotions and intelligence. They bleed and experience pain, expressing themselves in the same way a human might. While they are considered “inferior” because of their differences, the human part of them is wholly ignored, being reminiscent of the tradition of racism.

The case of racism against vampires in *Orange Marmalade* is different. They look exactly like humans so it is difficult to tell if a person is a vampire or not (Episode 1). The only point of differentiation is that they have sharper canines that protrude. Mari Baek, the female protagonist of the webtoon admits to grinding her canines once a month until they are blunt despite it being a painful process so that she can live among humans without fear of being discriminated against (*Orange Marmalade*, Episode 1). Because she’s so scared of being recognized as a vampire, Mari eats regular human food at school and then throws it up. She also drinks blood in the privacy of the bathroom because she is afraid that someone might see her and realize that she is a vampire if she does so in the open. The vampires are discriminated against for their source of nourishment when that is only one part of their identities. Their human intellect and emotions are again ignored and they are ostracized.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper started with the aiming of exploring the two focal webtoons from the point of view of racism. The overarching research questions centered on how the supernatural is used in the selected webtoons to highlight racism; how discrimination and otherization are rationalized by characters in the two stories; and what is the relevance of such comic webtoons for real-world issues racism in the present era? The analysis reveals that the webtoons *Days of Hana* and *Orange Marmalade* by Seokwoo incorporate supernatural elements in their plotlines not only to depict the notion of star-crossed love but also to comment on current debates on racism in different parts of the world. Instead of addressing the readers’ sensibilities directly through a tale of racism and violence perpetrated against a section of the human population, the artist uses the medium of the supernatural as a metaphor to highlight racism.

The communities of werewolves and vampires suffer in their respective worlds for being “different” from the accepted majority. Even as they work hard to be included, the hatred felt for them by other characters is palpable. Within the worlds of the two webtoons, the reader is guided towards discriminatory attitudes shaping up when a certain section is labeled as too different to be called human and when these attitudes are perpetuated by the powerful sections of the society. Establishing racist boundaries through the invocation of the supernatural is achieved through historical rationalization and social construction of differential narratives. The supernatural beings are treated as sub-humans because their human counterparts ignore their similarities to humans and instead focus on their dissimilarities. The webtoons, thus, expose the fragility of narratives of racial superiority based on superficial differences.

Implications of webtoons like the two focal stories studied in the current article are relevant for today’s world where right-wing politics and groups are gaining power at an increasing rate. As recent police

brutality incidents in 2020-21 against African-Americans in the US points out, forms of otherization lead to all kinds of abuses including verbal, physical, systemic, and shrinking of social spaces for inclusivity. To understand forms of racism and otherization that others or we may be implicated in, it is important to explore the imaginary reality that we create for ourselves and populate it with our day-to-day actions. Imaginative writings like webtoons can help us reflexively explore the hidden terrain of our conscious and unconscious beliefs that are based on xenophobia, otherization, distrust, hatred, and invisbalization. In todays' globalized world and the increased mixing of people from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, the risk of discrimination and otherization is high. Webtoons have the potential to play a role in mitigating the effects of ostracising attitudes by adopting powerful and memorable metaphors such as the invocation of the supernatural as a form of otherization studied in this paper.

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