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POWER ISSUES IN RACE AND ETHNICITY: A POSTCOLONIAL READING OF CULTURAL REPRESENTATION IN "EMILY IN PARIS"

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Abstract

This paper examines the dynamics of power, race, and ethnicity in Netflix's *Emily in Paris* (2020–present) through the lens of postcolonial theory. While the series is often celebrated for its cosmopolitan aesthetics and lighthearted portrayal of cross-cultural encounters, it simultaneously reproduces neo-colonial power relations embedded in Western media discourse. Drawing on the theoretical insights of Stuart Hall, Homi K. Bhabha, bell hooks, and Richard Dyer, this study explores how *Emily in Paris* constructs cultural hierarchies through the commodification of difference and the normalization of whiteness as a universal standard. Employing a qualitative textual analysis, the research investigates how the protagonist's "American perspective" symbolizes a continuation of cultural imperialism disguised as modernity and empowerment. Through its depiction of fashion, marketing, and interpersonal dynamics, the series frames the Western, specifically American, subject as an agent of progress and rationality amid a supposedly backward or resistant local culture. The findings reveal that beneath its global appeal and superficial diversity, *Emily in Paris* perpetuates asymmetrical power structures that align with postcolonial critiques of representation and cultural hegemony. This study contributes to broader discussions in cultural and media studies by highlighting how postcolonial frameworks remain vital for understanding racial and ethnic representation in contemporary global entertainment.

Keywords: *Postcolonialism, Race, Representation, Cultural Studies, Emily in Paris*

Abstrak

Tulisan ini menelaah dinamika kekuasaan, ras, dan etnisitas dalam serial Emily in Paris (2020-sekarang) produksi Netflix, melalui sudut pandang teori pascakolonial. Meskipun serial ini sering dipuji karena adanya estetika kosmopolitan dan penggambaran ringan tentang pertemuan lintas budaya, tetapi juga mereproduksi relasi kekuasaan neokolonial yang tertanam dalam wacana media Barat. Dengan merujuk pada pemikiran teoretis Stuart Hall, Homi K. Bhabha, bell hooks, dan Richard Dyer, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana Emily in Paris membangun hierarki budaya melalui komodifikasi perbedaan serta normalisasi identitas kulit putih sebagai standar universal. Melalui analisis tekstual kualitatif, penelitian ini menelusuri bagaimana sudut pandang "Amerika" dari tokoh utama merepresentasikan kelanjutan dari imperialisme budaya yang tersamarkan sebagai modernitas dan pemberdayaan. Melalui penggambaran mode, pemasaran, dan dinamika interpersonal, serial ini menempatkan subjek Barat, khususnya Amerika, sebagai agen kemajuan dan rasionalitas di tengah budaya lokal yang digambarkan tertinggal atau resisten. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa di balik daya tarik global dan keberagaman yang tampak di permukaan, Emily in Paris justru mempertahankan struktur kekuasaan yang asimetris sebagaimana dikritik dalam teori pascakolonial tentang representasi dan hegemoni budaya. Kajian ini berkontribusi terhadap diskursus yang lebih luas dalam studi budaya dan media dengan

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menegaskan relevansi kerangka pascakolonial dalam memahami representasi ras dan etnisitas dalam hiburan global kontemporer.

Kata kunci: *Pascakolonialisme, Ras, Representasi, Studi Budaya, Emily in Paris*

1. Introduction

The representation of race, ethnicity, and power in contemporary media continues to reflect the dynamics of postcolonial ideology and global capitalism. Although globalization has been celebrated as a process that erases cultural boundaries and promotes inclusivity, it also perpetuates hierarchical relationships between dominant and marginalized identities. Western media, in particular, has long functioned as an apparatus of cultural hegemony, reinforcing the norms and values of Euro-American superiority while commodifying non-Western or "othered" identities for entertainment and consumption. As Stuart Hall (1997) argues, representation is never neutral; it constructs meaning through power relations that define who can speak and who is spoken for. Within this context, Netflix's *Emily in Paris* (2020–present) becomes a productive site for exploring how cultural representation operates under the guise of cosmopolitanism and diversity.

Emily in Paris, created by Darren Star, follows the story of Emily Cooper, a young American woman who relocates to Paris to provide an "American perspective" to a French marketing firm. While the series gained popularity for its aesthetic appeal, fashion, and romanticized portrayal of Paris, it simultaneously exposes a complex web of cultural power. Emily embodies the archetype of the modern Western subject; ambitious, confident, and morally centered, who enters a foreign cultural space and "teaches" the locals how to be innovative, open-minded, and efficient. This characterization reproduces what Edward Said (1978) describes as the Orientalist gaze: a perspective that positions Western identity as the standard of progress and rationality, while depicting others as exotic, emotional, or resistant to change. Although France is not a postcolonial "Other" in the traditional sense, *Emily in Paris* extends the logic of cultural imperialism to intra-Western relations, revealing how American ideology asserts dominance even over other Western cultures.

The series' treatment of race and ethnicity further complicates its postcolonial reading. While *Emily in Paris* attempts to reflect multiculturalism through minor characters of color, these figures often remain peripheral, functioning as symbols of diversity rather than as agents of narrative power. bell hooks (1992) terms this phenomenon "eating the other," where racial

difference is consumed as aesthetic pleasure without challenging systemic inequalities. Thus, the series exemplifies how contemporary media negotiates inclusivity through commodification, transforming cultural difference into a marketable product. Through fashion, marketing, and interpersonal relationships, the show translates American neoliberal values into a global language of aspiration, perpetuating what Homi Bhabha (1994) identifies as "mimicry" the imitation of the West that both desires and resists its authority.

Existing scholarship has examined Emily in Paris primarily from the perspectives of gender, tourism, and consumer culture (e.g., Mroz, 2021; Pérez, 2023), yet there remains a notable gap in its postcolonial and racial analysis. This study aims to fill that gap by investigating how the series articulates power through its portrayal of cultural difference and racial representation. Using a qualitative textual analysis, the paper applies postcolonial theory to uncover the ways in which *Emily in Paris* reproduces American cultural dominance while simultaneously masking it under the rhetoric of global inclusivity.

The research seeks to answer the following questions: (1) How does Emily in Paris represent cultural difference and race within its narrative and visual discourse? and (2) In what ways does the series reflect the persistence of neo-colonial power structures in contemporary Western media?

The structure of this paper is as follows. The next section provides a theoretical framework drawing on the works of Stuart Hall, Homi K. Bhabha, bell hooks, Richard Dyer, and George M. Fredrickson to contextualize the relationship between representation, race, and power. This is followed by a cultural analysis of *Emily in Paris*, focusing on key scenes and character interactions that illustrate how the show commodifies difference while centering whiteness as the norm. The discussion section synthesizes these findings within the broader debates of postcolonial and cultural studies, before concluding with reflections on the implications of media representation in the age of global streaming platforms.

2. Theoretical Framework

This section outlines the theoretical concepts that inform the analysis of race, ethnicity, and power in *Emily in Paris*. The study draws primarily from postcolonial and cultural studies frameworks that interrogate how meaning is constructed and circulated through media

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representation. Central to this analysis are the works of Stuart Hall on representation and ideology, Homi K. Bhabha's notions of hybridity and mimicry, bell hooks' critique of white supremacy and cultural appropriation, Richard Dyer's analysis of whiteness, and George M. Fredrickson's historical understanding of racial hierarchy. Together, these frameworks provide the critical lens for examining how *Emily in Paris* reproduces neo-colonial power relations through seemingly progressive portrayals of cultural diversity.

Representation and Ideology: Stuart Hall

Stuart Hall (1997) emphasizes that representation is not merely a reflection of reality but a system of meaning that constructs reality through language, images, and discourse. Representation, in Hall's view, operates within ideological frameworks that serve particular social interests, often reinforcing dominant power structures. He explains that "it is by our use of things, and what we say, think and feel about them, how we represent them, that we give them a meaning" (Hall, 1997, p. 3). Media texts, therefore, become powerful cultural sites where meanings of race and identity are produced, contested, and circulated.

In *Emily in Paris*, representation functions ideologically by positioning the American protagonist as a figure of modernity and agency, while the French and other non-American characters are framed as eccentric, traditional, or resistant to progress. This aligns with Hall's argument that representation "involves the production of meaning through language and culture" (Hall, 1997, p. 15), and that these meanings are embedded in power relations. By privileging the American gaze as the standard of rationality and professionalism, the series reaffirms the symbolic dominance of Western identity within global media narratives.

Hybridity and Mimicry: Homi K. Bhabha

Homi K. Bhabha (1994) expands postcolonial discourse through the concepts of hybridity and mimicry, describing the ambivalent relationship between colonizer and colonized. Mimicry refers to the colonized subject's imitation of the colonizer's culture, behavior, or values "almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86), which destabilizes colonial authority while simultaneously reinforcing it. Hybridity, on the other hand, emerges as a space of negotiation where cultural differences are rearticulated, challenging the purity of both colonial and indigenous identities.

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In the context of *Emily in Paris*, these concepts illuminate how cultural exchange is portrayed as both desirable and hierarchical. French characters who adopt Emily's American work ethic or marketing strategies become hybrid figures within the narrative. However, their mimicry ultimately reaffirms American superiority, since success in the series is measured by alignment with American ideals of creativity, efficiency, and consumer engagement. This ambivalence reflects Bhabha's notion that colonial discourse seeks to produce compliant subjects while maintaining its authority. The French are thus constructed as both "civilized" and "in need of improvement," mirroring colonial patterns of domination disguised as cross-cultural collaboration.

Whiteness and Cultural Power: Richard Dyer

Richard Dyer (1997) provides a crucial framework for understanding how whiteness operates as an invisible standard in Western media. He argues that "whiteness functions as the unmarked category against which all racialized others are defined" (Dyer, 1997, p. 10). This invisibility of whiteness allows it to maintain universal authority, presenting itself as neutral, normative, and human.

In *Emily in Paris*, whiteness is both visible and invisible: Emily's identity as a white, middle-class American woman is the lens through which all cultural experiences are interpreted. Her ability to navigate, critique, and "improve" a foreign environment depends on her racialized privilege, even though race is rarely addressed explicitly. This exemplifies what Dyer calls "the power to look normal, to be just human" (1997, p. 45), while non-white and non-American identities are relegated to the margins of exoticism or token representation. Through this dynamic, the series reproduces the ideological function of whiteness as universal and aspirational.

Cultural Appropriation and the Commodification of Difference: bell hooks

Bell hooks' (1992) concept of "eating the other" is instrumental in analyzing how difference is commodified within consumer culture. hooks argues that multiculturalism in popular media often translates racial and ethnic difference into an aesthetic resource for white consumption. She writes that "ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture" (hooks, 1992, p. 21).

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In *Emily in Paris*, this dynamic manifests through fashion and marketing, where cultural motifs are appropriated and rebranded as chic, cosmopolitan trends. The show's depiction of diversity through background characters of various ethnicities, serves to enhance the global appeal of the narrative without challenging the hegemony of the white protagonist. This aligns with hooks' critique that diversity is often a "safe difference," consumed for pleasure rather than engaged as a site of political struggle. The commodification of culture in the series reflects neoliberal multiculturalism, where inclusion functions as branding rather than transformation.

Historical Foundations of Racial Power: George M. Fredrickson

To situate these cultural analyses historically, George M. Fredrickson (2002) provides a foundational understanding of how racial hierarchies evolved through Western intellectual and political traditions. He defines racism as "an ideology that considers human differences as both innate and hierarchical" (Fredrickson, 2002, p. 9). From colonialism to globalization, racial ideology has justified the expansion of Western dominance by naturalizing social inequalities.

Although *Emily in Paris* does not overtly engage with race in the traditional colonial sense, it inherits these hierarchies through its depiction of cultural superiority. American exceptionalism becomes the modern expression of racialized hierarchy, less biological but still ideological. The series reproduces what Fredrickson calls "a modernized form of ethnocentrism" (2002, p. 23), where cultural and racial differences are translated into markers of taste, professionalism, and progress.

3. Synthesis

Together, these theoretical frameworks reveal how power operates subtly through cultural representation. Hall explains how meaning constructs ideology; Bhabha uncovers the ambivalence of cultural imitation; Dyer exposes the invisibility of whiteness; hooks critiques the commodification of difference; and Fredrickson traces the historical continuity of racial hierarchy. Applying these theories to *Emily in Paris* allows a nuanced reading of how global media continues to reproduce postcolonial logics, even under the rhetoric of diversity and cosmopolitanism.

4. Cultural Analysis

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Netflix's *Emily in Paris* (2020–present) provides an illuminating example of how contemporary Western media translates postcolonial hierarchies into the language of cosmopolitanism. Through its visual style, character construction, and narrative tone, the series articulates a persistent ideology of American superiority disguised as cultural exchange. This section applies postcolonial theories to key scenes and episodes to examine how *Emily in Paris* constructs and circulates racialized and cultural power dynamics.

4.1 American Exceptionalism and Cultural Hierarchy

From its opening episode, *Emily in Paris* establishes the protagonist as a carrier of American modernity. When Emily arrives at Savoir, the French marketing firm, her supervisor Sylvie questions her presence, remarking that "We have our ways of doing things here." Emily replies confidently, "That's why I'm here, to bring the American perspective." This exchange encapsulates the ideological foundation of the series: the assumption that American perspectives are inherently innovative, efficient, and progressive, while non-American cultures are stagnant or outdated.

In postcolonial terms, Emily's character represents what Said (1978) identifies as the imperial gaze, the ability of the Western subject to define and "improve" the Other. Although France is not colonized in this context, it becomes symbolically "othered" through the narrative's moral hierarchy. Emily's methods are valorized as rational and creative, while French professionalism is depicted as emotional, disorganized, or elitist. This binary reproduces what Hall (1997) describes as ideological representation: a system that constructs cultural difference to sustain dominance. The Parisian world becomes a cultural backdrop against which American exceptionalism performs itself.

This pattern persists throughout the series, as Emily's American-style optimism and individualism consistently triumph over local customs. For instance, in Season 1, Episode 3 ("Sexy or Sexist"), Emily challenges a French perfume advertisement she perceives as misogynistic and convinces the team to market it through a more "empowered" lens. The narrative frames her intervention as moral progress, overlooking the ethnocentric assumption that American feminist discourse is universally applicable. This scene illustrates Bhabha's (1994) concept of mimicry in reverse, the colonizer's culture imposing itself under the guise of liberation.

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4.2 Fashion, Marketing, and the Commodification of Difference

Fashion and marketing, the twin pillars of the series, serve as mechanisms for commodifying cultural difference. In Season 2, Episode 5 ("An Englishman in Paris"), Emily collaborates with luxury designer Pierre Cadault, helping him rebrand his fashion line to appeal to a "global audience." She suggests integrating American-style social media campaigns, transforming the designer's work into a commodity for international consumption. Here, Parisian artistry; symbolic of cultural authenticity is redefined through capitalist marketing strategies that privilege visibility over substance.

bell hooks' (1992) notion of "eating the other" becomes particularly relevant in this context. hooks explains that cultural difference is frequently consumed as a sign of sophistication within white capitalist culture. In Emily in Paris, this consumption takes the form of fashion and lifestyle. The city of Paris, traditionally imagined as the cultural "Other" to America's modernity, is rebranded as a playground for American success. Emily's Instagram posts, which romanticize French architecture, cuisine, and art, commodify the city as both exotic and accessible, an aestheticized "experience" curated for Western audiences.

This aligns with Dyer's (1997) theory of whiteness as invisible normativity. Emily's ability to appropriate French culture without facing cultural resistance demonstrates the privilege of whiteness: her "innocent" curiosity and cultural confidence are celebrated rather than scrutinized. By contrast, characters of color, such as Julien (Samuel Arnold), a Black French colleague, are positioned as supporting figures who embody diversity but rarely challenge the central narrative. Julien's flamboyant personality and witty remarks contribute to the show's cosmopolitan aesthetic but lack substantive development, reflecting hooks' critique that difference becomes decorative rather than disruptive.

4.3 Racial Tokenism and Invisible Whiteness

Despite its global platform, Emily in Paris offers minimal racial diversity in its central cast. Characters of color, such as Julien or Mindy Chen (Ashley Park), exist primarily to enhance the show's global appeal. Mindy, a Chinese-Korean expatriate, performs Western pop songs in Parisian cafés, embodying what Bhabha (1994) calls "hybridity," yet her hybridity functions within the safe confines of Western entertainment. In Season 2, Episode 1, she sings "Diamonds

Are a Girl's Best Friend," a song originally popularized by Marilyn Monroe, symbolically reasserting the dominance of white femininity even in a multicultural setting.

This dynamic reveals how global media equates inclusion with assimilation. As Fredrickson (2002) notes, modern racism often disguises itself as cultural hierarchy rather than biological essentialism. *Emily in Paris* reflects this shift: racial differences are acknowledged aesthetically but subordinated to Western cultural frameworks. The show's whiteness remains the unmarked norm, and its non-white characters serve as multicultural accessories within a narrative centered on American self-realization.

4.4 Hybridity and Mimicry in Cultural Encounters

While *Emily in Paris* ostensibly celebrates cultural hybridity, its portrayal is fraught with asymmetry. French characters who adopt Emily's American marketing style are rewarded with professional success, whereas Emily rarely adapts to local customs. This asymmetry exemplifies Bhabha's (1994) argument that mimicry is "a double articulation," producing both resemblance and menace (p. 86). In the show, French identity becomes "almost American but not quite," reinforcing U.S. cultural dominance.

One illustrative moment occurs in Season 3, Episode 8 ("Fashion Victim"), when Sylvie reluctantly adopts Emily's social-media-driven marketing strategy to rescue a campaign. Her decision is framed as a breakthrough, proof that tradition must yield to modernity. Yet this "modernity" is distinctly American, rooted in neoliberal ideals of visibility, profit, and individual branding. The narrative thus translates postcolonial hierarchies into professional hierarchies: American methods become universal, while European traditions and by extension, non-Western perspectives are marked as obsolete.

Bhabha's theory of hybridity helps expose this contradiction. While *Emily in Paris* visually embodies cultural mixing, the direction of hybridity is unidirectional, others must mimic American modernity to achieve relevance. The show's global popularity therefore demonstrates how cultural imperialism operates through soft power, embedding U.S. values in the language of empowerment and global success.

4.5 Summary

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The analysis of *Emily in Paris* reveals how cultural representation in global media perpetuates subtle forms of postcolonial power. The series constructs an illusion of diversity and hybridity while centering whiteness, American exceptionalism, and capitalist modernity. Fashion and marketing serve as metaphors for the commodification of difference, and the inclusion of racialized characters functions primarily to authenticate the show's cosmopolitan appeal. Ultimately, *Emily in Paris* exemplifies how postcolonial hierarchies persist within contemporary entertainment, reflecting the global reach of American cultural hegemony.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that *Emily in Paris*, while outwardly a light romantic comedy, serves as a subtle reinforcement of neo-colonial power relations within the global media landscape. Its representation of cultural difference, race, and identity reflects broader postcolonial tensions between inclusion and dominance, hybridity and hierarchy, diversity and commodification. Drawing on Hall's (1997) theory of representation, Bhabha's (1994) notions of hybridity and mimicry, and hooks's (1992) critique of the "consumption of the Other," this discussion section unpacks how *Emily in Paris* functions as a site of cultural negotiation that ultimately privileges American whiteness under the guise of cosmopolitanism.

5.1 Whiteness as Cultural Centrality

The series situates Emily as the narrative and moral center, a white, middle-class American woman whose cultural sensibility becomes the axis around which Parisian life revolves. This positioning is not coincidental but symptomatic of what Richard Dyer (1997) calls the invisibility of whiteness, wherein white identity operates as the unmarked norm. In Emily in Paris, the titular character embodies "universal" values, rationality, optimism, productivity, that are implicitly coded as superior to the "irrational," "emotional," or "archaic" qualities attributed to French or other non-American characters. Even within a Western-to-Western encounter, the American is framed as modern and moral, while the European is exoticized.

This dynamic mirrors Edward Said's (1978) concept of Orientalism, albeit transposed into a Euro-American context. France, though Western, is rendered a cultural "other" to the United States, romantic, indulgent, and resistant to progress. Emily's interventions, such as modernizing marketing campaigns or challenging workplace norms, thus dramatize a symbolic colonization of cultural space. Her whiteness is not merely racial but ideological; it represents

the American neoliberal subject who conquers through persuasion, branding, and cultural fluency rather than overt domination.

5.2 The Commodification of Difference

Bell hooks (1992) critiques what she terms "eating the Other" the consumption of cultural difference as a sign of sophistication, adventure, or moral progress without challenging underlying power asymmetries. *Emily in Paris* exemplifies this process by aestheticizing diversity. The inclusion of minor characters of color, such as Mindy Chen (a Chinese-Korean heiress) and Julien (a Black French colleague), appears to gesture toward inclusivity. However, their roles remain largely decorative: they exist to affirm Emily's openness, humor, or moral sensitivity rather than to express their own subjectivity. Mindy's musical performances and Julien's flamboyant fashion sense add color and vibrancy, yet their characterization remains confined to stereotypes of the "exotic friend" or "sassy coworker."

This treatment reflects what Hall (1990) calls the politics of representation, where difference is both celebrated and controlled. The series' cosmopolitan imagery; interracial friendships, multilingual dialogue, and global branding, masks the persistence of whiteness as the normative center. Difference becomes a commodity, a visual cue of progressiveness that enhances the marketability of the show to a global audience. In this way, *Emily in Paris* exemplifies what Mirzoeff (2000) identifies as the visual culture of globalization, where diversity is not a social reality but a spectacle designed for consumption.

5.3 Cultural Hybridity and Neocolonial Ideology

Homi Bhabha's (1994) theory of hybridity provides a nuanced framework for interpreting the cultural interplay in Emily in Paris. The series depicts Paris as a hybrid space where American and French values collide, producing both tension and fascination. However, this hybridity is asymmetrical: the American perspective dominates, while French culture becomes a charming backdrop. Emily's success in integrating American marketing strategies into a French company demonstrates what Bhabha describes as mimicry, the imitation of Western ideals that paradoxically reinforces colonial authority. The French characters, though initially resistant, ultimately adopt Emily's methods, affirming the superiority of American pragmatism and innovation.

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This narrative structure embodies what Fredrickson (2002) calls racial hierarchy in cultural form, a modern adaptation of the colonial mindset that ranks identities based on proximity to Western ideals. Even in the absence of overt racial conflict, the series perpetuates a racialized worldview in which Western whiteness signifies universality and progress. The hybridity celebrated by the show is thus superficial: rather than generating mutual transformation, it produces a one-way assimilation into American ideology.

5.4 Gendered Dimensions of Power

The postcolonial reading of *Emily in Paris* is further complicated by its gender politics. On the surface, the series promotes female empowerment through Emily's career success and independence. Yet, as Mohanty (2003) argues, Western feminism often universalizes women's experiences, erasing cultural specificity. Emily's empowerment is rooted in neoliberal values of individualism, consumerism, and professional achievement, which are presented as universally desirable. Her ability to navigate and "improve" French society mirrors the colonial narrative of the white woman as a civilizing agent; a trope that Gayatri Spivak (1988) critiques as "white men saving brown women from brown men," now transformed into "white women saving less modern women (and men) from themselves."

This gendered imperialism reinforces the idea that Western women embody the ideal of liberation, while others lag behind. Even Mindy's storyline, framed around reclaiming her voice, parallels Emily's journey, subtly positioning the American protagonist as the catalyst for her friend's transformation. Thus, the feminist narrative operates within the same neo-colonial logic that underpins the show's cultural dynamics.

5.5 Postcolonial Media in the Age of Global Streaming

In the globalized media ecosystem, streaming platforms like Netflix function as cultural empires that distribute Western narratives worldwide. As Wayne (2018) observes, digital globalization allows American cultural products to circulate more widely than ever, often under the rhetoric of universality. *Emily in Paris* represents this phenomenon vividly: its Paris is not a real cultural space but a transnational fantasy; a sanitized, Instagram-ready version of Europe tailored to Western audiences. The show's global popularity demonstrates how Western media reasserts symbolic dominance by exporting its values of aspiration, romance, and self-branding.

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This aligns with what Hall (1991) describes as the global-local dialectic, wherein global media homogenizes cultural meanings while local identities are repackaged as consumable symbols. The Paris of *Emily in Paris* is thus not French but global-American; a product of cultural translation designed to flatter international viewers' cosmopolitan desires. Beneath this global inclusivity lies a persistent postcolonial order: the West remains the producer of meaning, while other cultures supply aesthetic material.

5.6 Summary

Ultimately, *Emily in Paris* demonstrates how contemporary entertainment continues to circulate postcolonial ideologies through soft power. The show's charm lies in its accessibility, it invites viewers to celebrate diversity without questioning inequality. By aestheticizing cultural difference, it transforms racial and ethnic others into ornamental figures within a Western narrative of self-discovery and success. Through the lens of Hall, Bhabha, hooks, Dyer, and Fredrickson, this discussion reveals that media representation remains a powerful tool for sustaining ideological control in a supposedly "post-racial" and "postcolonial" age.

Conclusion and Implications

This study set out to explore how *Emily in Paris* reflects and reproduces postcolonial power relations through its representations of race, ethnicity, and cultural identity. Using a postcolonial framework grounded in the works of Stuart Hall, Homi K. Bhabha, bell hooks, Richard Dyer, and George M. Fredrickson, the analysis has shown that the series, despite its surface-level inclusivity and cosmopolitan aesthetic, perpetuates hierarchies rooted in Western dominance. Beneath its colorful imagery and comedic tone, *Emily in Paris* operates as a cultural text that both masks and normalizes neo-colonial ideology through the rhetoric of diversity, empowerment, and globalization.

The central finding of this research is that *Emily in Paris* reaffirms whiteness as the invisible norm and moral center of global narratives. Emily's identity as a young, white, American woman positions her as a symbolic agent of progress, rationality, and modernity. Through her interactions with Parisian colleagues and friends, the series constructs an implicit binary between American dynamism and French stagnation, reproducing what Hall (1997) identifies as the regime of representation, a system of meaning that reinforces cultural superiority. This logic extends beyond nationality to encompass broader racial and ideological hierarchies: the

Western subject is valorized, while others, including characters of color, remain peripheral and commodified.

The show's engagement with race is superficial, reflecting hooks's (1992) concept of "eating the Other." Diversity becomes an aesthetic strategy rather than a political stance. Characters such as Mindy Chen and Julien embody cultural difference, yet they are stripped of narrative depth and agency. Their presence affirms the illusion of inclusion while preserving the dominance of white, American subjectivity. This pattern demonstrates how global media industries, particularly streaming platforms like Netflix, package diversity into marketable forms that appeal to international audiences without challenging existing power structures.

At the same time, Bhabha's (1994) notion of hybridity helps explain the series' seductive complexity. Emily in Paris presents a hybrid cultural space where American and French values seemingly merge, yet this hybridity is asymmetrical, it privileges American neoliberal ideals as the universal template for success. Such representational strategies align with Fredrickson's (2002) observation that racial hierarchies evolve rather than disappear; they are reformulated through cultural discourse rather than biological essentialism.

The implications of this analysis extend beyond *Emily in Paris*. In an era of global media streaming, postcolonial critique remains essential for understanding how entertainment reproduces symbolic domination. As Netflix and similar platforms expand their reach, they often circulate Western-centric values under the guise of cosmopolitanism. This underscores the need for media literacy that encourages audiences to recognize the ideological dimensions of representation. Viewers must move beyond passive consumption toward critical engagement, questioning how narratives of "diversity" and "empowerment" may conceal systems of exclusion.

Finally, this study invites future research to expand postcolonial inquiry into other global streaming productions, especially those that claim to celebrate multiculturalism. Comparative studies across non-Western contexts, such as Asian or African representations on Western platforms, would further illuminate how global media constructs hierarchies of visibility and belonging. By continuing to interrogate cultural texts through postcolonial and critical race perspectives, scholars can expose the subtle persistence of imperial logic in the seemingly borderless world of digital entertainment.

In conclusion, *Emily in Paris* illustrates how media can function as both a reflection and a reproduction of power. It invites laughter, aspiration, and aesthetic pleasure, yet beneath its romanticized façade lies the familiar narrative of Western dominance reshaped for the 21st century. Recognizing these patterns is not merely an act of critique; it is an act of reclaiming interpretive agency, reminding us that representation, as Hall (1997) asserts, is always a terrain of struggle over meaning and power.

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