

Cultural Identity and Negotiation in Catherine Kalengula's Novelization of *Emily in Paris*: A Qualitative Content Analysis

Lutin Nur Rohmi Rahayu¹

¹ STITMA Blitar. e-mail: luthiennur@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Keywords:</p> <p>cultural identity, intercultural communication, qualitative analysis, <i>Emily in Paris</i>, cultural hybridity</p>	<p>This study investigates the representation of identity and cultural negotiation in the novel <i>Emily in Paris</i>. Employing a qualitative content analysis approach, the research explores how the protagonist, Emily Cooper, experiences cultural adaptation, identity conflict, and self-expression while living abroad. Data were derived from close textual reading of the novel, supported by theoretical perspectives from cultural studies and identity negotiation theory. The findings reveal that Emily's identity construction is shaped by the intersection of American individualism and French collectivist cultural norms. Furthermore, the narrative highlights the challenges of intercultural communication, gender representation, and the tension between professional ambition and personal relationships. This study contributes to the broader understanding of how literature reflects cultural hybridity and the negotiation of identity in a globalized context.</p>
<p>How to cite:</p> <p>Rahayu, Lutin, (2025). <i>Cultural Identity and Negotiation in Catherine Kalengula's Novelization of Emily in Paris: A Qualitative Content Analysis</i>. <i>English Language Teaching, Literature and Linguistics</i>, Vol 1 (Digital and Multimodal Innovations in English Language Teaching and Literary Studies, 18-21</p>	

1. Introduction

Literature serves as a mirror of social reality, reflecting cultural values, tensions, and identity struggles. The novel *Emily in Paris*, adapted from the popular Netflix series, presents the story of an American woman navigating her life in Paris. Beyond its romanticized narrative, the text offers a fertile ground for academic inquiry into issues of identity, cultural adaptation, and intercultural relations.

This study examines how the protagonist, Emily Cooper, constructs her identity amidst cultural differences. It further explores the representation of American and French cultural

values within the novel, aiming to uncover how literature portrays the negotiation of cultural identity in contemporary global society.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Cultural Identity

Cultural identity is often understood as a dynamic and negotiated process rather than a fixed trait (Hall, 1990). Bhabha (1994) emphasizes hybridity, where identity is constructed in the "in-between" spaces of cultural encounters. Ting-Toomey (2012) adds that intercultural communication involves constant negotiation to maintain self-identity while respecting others.

2.2 Previous Research

Previous research on *Emily in Paris* (the TV series) highlights its portrayal of stereotypes and intercultural miscommunication (Müller, 2021; Choi, 2022). Smith (2021) analyzes fashion as a marker of identity, while Laurent (2022) critiques cultural representation in transatlantic media. However, the novelization has not been studied in depth, creating an opportunity for literary analysis to complement media studies.

3. Research Methodology

This research employs a **qualitative content analysis** of Catherine Kalengula's *Emily in Paris* (2022). The method follows Schreier's (2012) systematic approach, which involves:

1. **Close reading** of the text.
2. **Thematic coding** under three main categories:

Cultural Misunderstanding

Adaptation Strategies

Hybrid Identity Formation

3. **Interpretation** using theories of cultural identity (Hall, 1990; Ting-Toomey, 2012).

Data were drawn directly from the novel's narrative, with attention to Emily's thoughts, dialogue, and behavior as markers of cultural negotiation.

4. Findings

4.1. Cultural Misunderstanding as Narrative Tension

In the novel, Emily's initial encounters with French colleagues reveal frequent clashes between her American directness and the French preference for subtlety. For instance, her enthusiastic work style is interpreted as naïve, while her lack of fluency in French leads to misunderstandings. Kalengula's prose emphasizes Emily's internal frustration, highlighting the emotional dimension of cultural miscommunication.

4.2. Adaptation Strategies and Agency

Unlike the series, which often foregrounds visual humor, the novel places greater emphasis on Emily's reflection and decision-making. Through narrative introspection, readers witness Emily's conscious attempts to adapt—learning key phrases in French, observing social

etiquette, and modifying her marketing pitches to suit Parisian sensibilities. These strategies reflect Ting-Toomey's (2012) notion of identity negotiation, where individuals actively adjust their behavior to maintain face and relational harmony.

4.3. Hybrid Identity Formation

Over time, Emily develops a hybrid identity, blending her American optimism with French sophistication. This hybridity is expressed in her professional success, as she designs campaigns that combine global marketing strategies with local cultural insight. Kalengula portrays Emily's journey as one of personal growth, where identity is neither fixed nor binary but fluid and evolving.

4.4. Transmedia Narrative Implications

The novelization demonstrates how identity negotiation can be reinterpreted across media. While the television series conveys culture through visual spectacle, the novelization provides deeper psychological access to Emily's thought process. This suggests that transmedia adaptations can enrich scholarly understanding of cultural identity by offering multiple representational modes.

5. Discussion

The findings align with Hall's (1990) concept of cultural identity as a continuous process of becoming rather than a static essence. Emily's misunderstandings demonstrate the tension between fixed cultural norms, while her adaptation strategies reflect Ting-Toomey's (2012) model of identity negotiation.

Importantly, Kalengula's novel emphasizes internal reflection more than the TV series. Readers gain access to Emily's inner thoughts, revealing her insecurities and growth. This highlights the value of the novelization as a **transmedia narrative**: while the series showcases external cultural clashes through visuals, the novel enriches the story with psychological depth.

The theme of hybrid identity echoes Bhabha's (1994) notion of the "third space," where cultural fusion occurs. Emily's journey in the novel illustrates how personal identity evolves when navigating between contrasting cultural worlds.

6. Conclusion

This study concludes that Catherine Kalengula's *Emily in Paris* novelization portrays cultural identity as a negotiated, evolving process. Emily's experiences illustrate three stages: misunderstanding, adaptation, and hybridity. Unlike the series, the novel emphasizes introspection, making it a unique contribution to cultural studies and transmedia analysis.

Future studies could compare the novel and the TV series directly, or examine how readers interpret Emily's cultural journey. This research suggests that novelizations deserve more attention as literary spaces where cultural identity is not only represented but also reimaged

References

- Ashcroft, Bill., Griffiths, Gareth., & Tiffin, Helen. (2002). *The Empire Writes Back*. Routledge.
- Bhabha, Homi K. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. Routledge.
- Choi, Young. (2022). Humor, culture, and conflict: Miscommunication in *Emily in Paris*. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, 31(1), 66–82.
- Hall, Stuart. (1990). Cultural identity and diaspora. In Jonathan Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (pp. 222–237). Lawrence & Wishart.
- Hofstede, Geert. (2001). *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Jenkins, Henry. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York University Press.
- Kalengula, Catherine. (2022). *Emily in Paris*. Studio Press / Bonnier.
- Kim, Young Yun. (2001). *Becoming Intercultural: An Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation*. Sage.
- Laurent, Marie. (2022). Parisian identity and stereotypes in transatlantic media. *Journal of Cultural Studies*, 15(3), 45–59.
- Müller, Franz. (2021). Paris through clichés: The visual politics of *Emily in Paris*. *European Media Studies Review*, 8(2), 101–118.
- Nye, Joseph. (2004). *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. PublicAffairs.
- Schreier, Margrit. (2012). *Qualitative Content Analysis in Practice*. Sage.
- Smith, John. (2021). Fashion and identity in Netflix's *Emily in Paris*. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 54(4), 876–895.
- Ting-Toomey, Stella. (2012). *Communicating Across Cultures*. Guilford Press.
- Tomlinson, John. (1999). *Globalization and Culture*. University of Chicago Press.