

Reading *Trese* through Hybridity and Symbolic Interactionism: Constructing the Postcolonial Filipino Hero

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Abstract

This study examines *Trese* (2021), Netflix's first Filipino animated series, as a postcolonial cultural text that negotiates Filipino identity, heroism, and world-building within the conditions of global streaming. Drawing on Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory and Herbert Blumer's symbolic interactionism, the study integrates macro-level analysis of structural hybridity with micro-level examination of identity formation through social interaction. Using a qualitative, theory-driven critical textual analysis, the research analyzes *Trese*'s world-building, narrative motifs, and central protagonist, Alexandra Trese, to address how postcolonial hybridity is articulated and enacted. The findings reveal that *Trese* constructs Manila as a postcolonial Third Space where myth, bureaucracy, and informal justice coexist, exposing the limitations of modern institutions shaped by colonial residue. Alexandra Trese emerges as a structurally hybrid subject whose ambivalent inheritance of authority produces a form of heroism grounded in negotiation rather than moral absolutism. Through symbolic interaction, her identity as a hero is socially produced and continuously reaffirmed through interactions with police, supernatural beings, and civil society. Ultimately, the study argues that *Trese* reconfigures Filipino hero archetypes by shifting heroism from masculinity and nationalist spectacle toward relational authority, ethical restraint, and contextual negotiation, illustrating the possibilities and limits of postcolonial representation under platform capitalism.

Keywords: Trese, Postcolonial hybridity, Symbolic interactionism, Myth and modernity, Filipino popular culture, Filipino Comics, Postcolonial hero

Introduction

Global streaming as a postcolonial cultural condition

In recent years, global streaming platforms have played an increasingly influential role in shaping how local narratives circulate beyond their national borders. Platforms such as Netflix are often framed as democratizing media access by amplifying stories from diverse cultures. However, this visibility is not neutral. Rather, global streaming functions as a structuring cultural environment that mediates which stories become legible to international audiences and under what conditions (Karim, 2025). Within this context, local narratives from the Global South are frequently required to negotiate the pressures of global accessibility, genre familiarity, and market expectations.

Scholars of postcolonial media have long noted that cultural flows between the Global North and Global South remain asymmetrical. While local stories gain unprecedented reach through global platforms, they often do so within frameworks shaped by Western norms of storytelling, aesthetics, and genre conventions (Ponzanesi, 2018). This asymmetry does not necessarily result in cultural erasure, but it does impose constraints on representation. Global circulation demands a balance between cultural specificity and global legibility, compelling creators to translate localized mythologies and histories into narrative forms recognizable to transnational audiences.

This dynamic aligns with what scholars describe as glocalization—the simultaneous localization and

globalization of cultural products (Roudometof & Dessì, 2022). Under glocalization, local narratives are not merely exported but are reconfigured to function within global cultural economies. Such processes are particularly evident in streaming-era adaptations, where stories rooted in indigenous traditions are reframed through globally dominant genres such as crime noir, fantasy, or animation. These genres act as familiar entry points for global audiences while also reshaping how local identities are represented.

Animation and genre fiction, in particular, have emerged as privileged sites for postcolonial negotiation. Their symbolic flexibility allows for the coexistence of myth, modernity, and speculative imagination, enabling cultural texts to articulate histories of colonial disruption while remaining accessible to diverse audiences. As such, global streaming does not simply disseminate culture; it actively shapes the conditions under which postcolonial identities are narrated, negotiated, and consumed.

Introducing *Trese*: Premise, narrative world, and central conflict

Released in 2021, *Trese* is Netflix's first Filipino animated series and an adaptation of the award-winning noir komiks created by Budjette Tan and illustrated by Kajo Baldesimo. *Trese* draws heavily from Philippine urban folklore, precolonial belief systems, and the socio-political anxieties of contemporary Manila (Tan, 2020). Set in contemporary Manila, the series unfolds in a city where modern urban life coexists uneasily with supernatural forces drawn from Philippine folklore. Crimes committed in the city are not always human in origin, and when conventional law enforcement reaches its limits, a different kind of authority is called upon.

At the center of the narrative is Alexandra Trese, a quiet and enigmatic detective who also serves as the city's foremost mediator between the human world and the realm of mythic beings. As the head babaylan—an inherited role rooted in precolonial spiritual leadership—Alexandra is tasked with maintaining balance in a city threatened by both supernatural unrest and human corruption. Each episode presents a case that draws her deeper into Manila's hidden underworld, revealing how folklore, crime, politics, and historical grievances intersect beneath the surface of everyday urban life.

While *Trese* follows the structure of a supernatural crime series, its conflicts are rarely resolved through simple triumph or moral clarity. Instead, the narrative emphasizes negotiation, restraint, and consequence. Alexandra's authority does not stem solely from physical strength but from her position as an intermediary—one who must navigate competing loyalties, ancestral obligations, and modern institutions. Through its episodic mysteries and overarching narrative of familial legacy and political unrest, *Trese* presents a world shaped by unresolved histories, where justice is provisional, and identity is forged in the space between worlds.

***Trese* as a hybrid Filipino media text**

Within this global streaming landscape, *Trese* occupies a distinctive position as a Filipino cultural text that bridges local mythology and global media forms. Its adaptation into a Netflix animated series in 2021 marked a significant moment in Philippine media history, positioning Filipino mythologies within transnational circulation.

The transition from print komiks to animation introduced notable shifts in visual style, narrative pacing, and genre expectations. While the original graphic novels rely on dense intertextual references and episodic storytelling, the animated series adopts a streamlined narrative structure consistent with global animated crime dramas. This shift reflects the demands of platform-based storytelling, where narrative clarity and pacing are crucial for audience retention. At the same time, the series retains its mythological core, populating its narrative with aswangs, tikbalangs, and other figures drawn from Philippine folklore.

Scholars have described *Trese*'s Manila as a heterotopic space, where supernatural and bureaucratic systems coexist, reflecting the tensions of urban modernity in a postcolonial city (Manansala, 2018). The noir aesthetic—characterized by moral ambiguity, shadowed cityscapes, and fractured authority—intersects with indigenous myth, producing a hybrid narrative world that resists simple categorization as either traditional or modern. This fusion exemplifies how *Trese* operates as a hybrid media text, simultaneously grounded in local cultural memory and shaped by global genre conventions.

Importantly, the Netflix adaptation also repositions *Trese* within a global creative economy. As Molina (2021) notes, the series foregrounds Filipino creatives and narratives while navigating the expectations of an international audience. In doing so, *Trese* becomes not merely an adaptation but a negotiation—one that illustrates how Filipino identity is mediated, translated, and rearticulated through global platforms.

Research problem and scholarly gap

Despite growing scholarly interest in *Trese* and similar media texts, existing research has primarily concentrated on three primary areas: the preservation and reinterpretation of folklore, representations of urban modernity, and the dynamics of transmedia adaptation (Altenberg & Corti, 2022). While these studies provide valuable insights, they often stop short of engaging deeply with the theoretical implications of *Trese* as a postcolonial and symbolic text.

In particular, much of the scholarship invokes hybridity as a descriptive concept without sustained engagement with Homi K. Bhabha's theorization of hybridity as a structurally conditioned and politically charged process (Reyes, 2018). Similarly, while identity and heroism are frequently discussed, there is limited use of symbolic interactionism as an analytical framework for understanding how heroic identity is constructed through social interaction, role-taking, and symbolic meaning-making.

As Flores (2019) argues, postcolonial cultural texts function as “third spaces” where identities are continuously negotiated. However, existing studies rarely connect this macro-level postcolonial insight with micro-level analyses of character interaction and social meaning. This absence results in a gap between structural postcolonial critique and the lived, interactional dimensions of identity formation.

Furthermore, Philippine cultural scholarship has increasingly called for more nuanced analyses of popular culture that move beyond nationalist celebration toward critical interrogation (Tolentino, 2016; Wegner, 2025). In this context, *Trese* presents an opportunity to bridge these analytical levels by examining how postcolonial structures shape symbolic interaction and how, in turn, interaction produces new configurations of heroism.

Research objectives and research questions

This study aims to examine *Trese* as a postcolonial cultural text that negotiates Filipino identity within the conditions of global streaming. Specifically, it seeks to analyze how postcolonial structures and symbolic interactions shape the series' world-building, its protagonist's subjectivity, and its reconfiguration of Filipino hero archetypes.

Guided by this aim, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What postcolonial elements are articulated in *Trese*'s world-building—particularly in its setting, characters, and narrative motifs—when analyzed through Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and the Third Space?
2. How is Alexandra Trese's postcolonial subjectivity constructed in the series through hybridity, ambivalence, and mimicry?
3. How do Alexandra Trese's social interactions, assigned roles, and symbolic meanings shape her identity and self-understanding as a hero?
4. In what ways does Alexandra Trese's hybrid and socially negotiated identity challenge or rework traditional Filipino popular culture hero archetypes?

Theoretical framework

The preceding discussion established *Trese* as a cultural text produced within global streaming conditions that mediate Filipino identity through hybrid narrative forms. Building from this context, the present chapter outlines the theoretical foundations that guide the analysis. This study draws primarily from Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory and Herbert Blumer's symbolic interactionism, which together allow for an examination of both the structural conditions that shape hybridity and the interactional processes through which heroic identity is constructed and interpreted.

Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonialism: Structural conditions of hybridity

Postcolonial theory, as articulated by Homi K. Bhabha, provides a critical framework for understanding how cultural identities emerge under the enduring influence of colonial histories and global power relations. Bhabha challenges essentialist notions of identity by arguing that culture is not fixed or

singular, but instead produced through processes of negotiation, translation, and contestation (Bhabha, 1994). In this sense, postcolonial identity is historically conditioned and structurally constrained, shaped by colonial residue as well as by contemporary global cultural flows.

Central to Bhabha's theory is the concept of hybridity, which refers to the creation of new cultural forms arising from the interaction between colonizer and colonized. Hybridity is not merely a blending of cultures but a disruptive process that unsettles dominant structures of meaning. As Umar and Lawan (2024) explain, hybridity emerges in spaces where colonial authority is both reproduced and undermined, resulting in identities that are neither fully indigenous nor wholly Western. These identities occupy an in-between position that reflects the contradictions of postcolonial existence.

This in-betweenness is articulated through Bhabha's concept of the Third Space. The Third Space is a liminal zone where cultural meanings are produced beyond binary oppositions such as colonizer/colonized, traditional/modern, or native/foreign (Bhabha, 1994). Rather than resolving these binaries, the Third Space exposes their instability, allowing for new forms of articulation and resistance. Cultural texts that operate within this space do not simply replicate dominant narratives but rework them through localized reinterpretation.

Closely associated with hybridity are the concepts of ambivalence and mimicry. Ambivalence describes the contradictory positioning of the postcolonial subject, who may simultaneously admire, resist, and internalize colonial authority. Mimicry, meanwhile, refers to the partial imitation of the colonizer—what Bhabha famously describes as being “almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha, 1994). While mimicry appears to reinforce dominant power, it also exposes its fragility by revealing the impossibility of full replication. As such, mimicry becomes a strategy that destabilizes authority rather than simply submitting to it.

Within the context of *Trese*, Bhabha's postcolonial framework explains why hybridity exists and how power conditions cultural form. The series' world-building—particularly its depiction of Manila as a space where supernatural folklore coexists with modern institutions—can be read as a Third Space shaped by colonial history and global modernity (RQ1).

At the level of character, Alexandra Trese embodies postcolonial hybridity through her ambivalent positioning between indigenous spirituality and modern systems of justice. Raised by parents representing divergent worldviews, Alexandra negotiates inherited colonial structures while retaining indigenous values, positioning her as a structurally hybrid subject (RQ2). Through Bhabha's theory, *Trese* is thus understood not merely as a hybrid aesthetic product but as a postcolonial text that reflects the ongoing negotiation of Filipino identity.

Herbert Blumer's symbolic interactionism: Processual identity formation

While Bhabha's postcolonialism accounts for the structural and historical conditions under which hybridity emerges, symbolic interactionism, as developed by Herbert Blumer, provides a complementary framework for analyzing how identity is enacted and interpreted through social interaction. Originating from the work of George Herbert Mead, symbolic interactionism emphasizes the micro-level processes through which meaning is constructed, maintained, and revised in everyday social life (Mead, 1934).

At its core, symbolic interactionism rests on the premise that meaning does not reside inherently in objects, roles, or symbols, but emerges through interaction. Individuals act toward things based on the meanings those things have for them, and these meanings arise from social interaction rather than from intrinsic qualities (Blumer, 1969). Meaning is, therefore, dynamic, shaped through ongoing interpretive processes as individuals respond to others and adjust their behavior accordingly.

Blumer (1969) identifies identity as a negotiated outcome of three interrelated processes: role-taking, social expectation, and interpretive adjustment. Role-taking involves understanding oneself from the perspective of others; social expectations provide shared definitions of appropriate behavior; and interpretive adjustment allows individuals to revise their self-concept in response to interactional feedback. Through these processes, identity is not fixed but continually formed and reformed.

In media texts, characters function as symbolic actors embedded within networks of interaction. Their

identities are shaped not only by internal traits but also by how other characters respond to them and by the meanings audiences assign to their actions. Janoski (2025) emphasizes that symbolic interactionism remains relevant in contemporary cultural analysis precisely because it accounts for how identities are stabilized through repeated symbolic exchanges.

Applied to *Trese*, symbolic interactionism explains how Alexandra Trese's identity as a hero is enacted, stabilized, and revised through interaction (RQ3). Alexandra's role as a lakan-babaylan is not defined solely by her lineage or abilities, but by how supernatural beings, law enforcement, and the community recognize and respond to her authority. Through repeated interactions, expectations of heroism are projected onto her, shaping both her self-understanding and her public identity. Symbolic interactionism thus allows the analysis to move beyond structural hybridity and examine the lived, relational dimensions of heroism within the narrative.

Integrating Bhabha and Blumer: Macro–micro synthesis

Taken together, Bhabha's postcolonialism and Blumer's symbolic interactionism offer a macro–micro analytical synthesis that is particularly suited to the study of *Trese*. Postcolonial theory explains the structural positioning and cultural constraints under which Filipino identities are produced, emphasizing history, power, and global inequality (Ashcroft et al., 2013; Gandhi, 1998). Symbolic interactionism, by contrast, explains the processual construction of meaning and identity, focusing on interaction, role performance, and interpretation.

This integration aligns with broader cultural studies approaches that conceptualize identity as relational, negotiated, and historically situated (Hall, 1990). Rather than treating structure and agency as oppositional, the combined framework demonstrates how postcolonial conditions shape the symbolic resources available for identity construction, while interaction determines how those resources are enacted and understood. Halualani and Nakayama (2010) similarly argue that identity must be analyzed at the intersection of structural power and everyday communication practices.

In the context of *Trese*, this macro–micro synthesis enables an analysis of both hybrid conditions and negotiated hero identity. Bhabha's theory accounts for the structural hybridity of the narrative world and Alexandra's postcolonial positioning, while Blumer's framework explains how her heroism is socially produced through interaction and meaning-making. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive lens through which *Trese* can be read as a cultural text that not only reflects postcolonial hybridity but also actively constructs new models of Filipino heroism within global media.

Methodology

Building from the theoretical foundations discussed in the previous chapter, this study employs a qualitative methodological approach designed to examine *Trese* as a postcolonial cultural text and Alexandra Trese as a hybrid heroic figure. Given that the study is concerned with meaning-making, representation, and identity construction within a media narrative, a qualitative, theory-driven approach is most appropriate. Rather than measuring audience response or reception, the methodology focuses on the internal dynamics of the text itself—its characters, settings, and symbolic structures—through critical textual analysis.

Research design and analytical orientation

This study adopts a qualitative, theory-driven critical textual analysis, grounded in cultural and media studies traditions. Qualitative research is particularly suited to this inquiry because it allows for close engagement with narrative detail, symbolism, and contextual meaning, which are essential in examining postcolonial identity and heroism (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Instead of treating the text as a static object, this approach understands media texts as cultural artifacts shaped by historical, social, and ideological forces.

The analysis is guided primarily by Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory and Herbert Blumer's symbolic interactionism, which together inform both what is examined in the text and how interpretation is carried out. In line with Jensen's (2021) articulation of media research, the study approaches *Trese* as a site where cultural meaning is produced rather than merely reflected. This orientation allows for the examination of how hybridity, identity, and heroism are constructed

through narrative, character interaction, and visual symbolism.

Notably, the study deliberately prioritizes representational meaning over audience reception. While reception studies offer valuable insights, the lack of sustained academic research and systematically documented audience responses to *Trese* limits their applicability to the present inquiry. Instead, focusing on the text itself allows the researcher to analyze how meaning is structured internally and how theoretical concepts are encoded within the narrative. This decision ensures coherence between the research questions, theoretical framework, and analytical method.

Data corpus and limitations

The primary data corpus for this study is *Trese* Season 1, the Netflix animated series released in 2021 (Tan, 2021). The series consists of six episodes, each approximately 23 minutes long, providing a concise yet comprehensive narrative suitable for in-depth qualitative analysis. The manageable scope of the series allows for repeated viewing and close examination of scenes, character interactions, and recurring motifs relevant to postcolonial hybridity and hero identity.

While the original *Trese* komiks series serves as an important cultural and narrative reference point, it is not treated as the primary object of analysis. References to the komiks are made only where necessary to contextualize characters, settings, or mythological elements. This delimitation is intentional, as comparative analyses between the komiks and the animated adaptation have already been addressed by existing scholarship. By focusing exclusively on the Netflix series, the study remains aligned with its central concern: the representation of Filipino identity within a global streaming context.

Furthermore, the study explicitly excludes audience reception, production analysis, and animation technique from its scope. These exclusions are not shortcomings but methodological choices that allow for a focused and theoretically grounded reading of *Trese* as a postcolonial media text.

Analytical procedures and operationalization

The analytical process follows a theory-led thematic coding approach, combining visual-textual analysis with character analysis. The researcher engaged

in repeated viewing of all six episodes to identify recurring patterns, motifs, and interactions relevant to the study's theoretical frameworks. Screenshots and detailed scene descriptions were used as visual data to support interpretation and ensure analytic transparency.

The analysis operationalizes key theoretical concepts through specific indicators. Hybridity is identified through the intersection of indigenous folklore with modern urban institutions, such as the coexistence of supernatural beings with law enforcement and bureaucratic systems. Mimicry is examined through Alexandra Trese's partial adoption of global hero tropes—such as the detective figure or lone enforcer—inflected with local cultural values and constraints. Symbolic interaction is operationalized by analyzing role assignment, social expectations, and responses from other characters, particularly how Alexandra's authority and heroism are negotiated through interaction rather than assumed.

Interpretation was conducted iteratively, allowing emerging insights to be refined through continued engagement with both the text and the theoretical framework (Berger, 2016; Kenney, 2009). Reflexivity was maintained throughout the process by acknowledging the researcher's interpretive role and grounding all claims in textual evidence and established theory.

To ensure rigor and trustworthiness, the study adheres to the qualitative criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is strengthened through close alignment with theory and the use of detailed textual evidence. A rich description of scenes and narrative contexts supports transferability. Dependability and confirmability are maintained through systematic documentation of analytic procedures and transparent articulation of methodological choices. Together, these measures ensure that the findings are both theoretically grounded and methodologically sound.

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Analysis and findings

The Modern Babaylan: Interrogating postcolonial identity in *Trese*

This chapter presents the findings of the study by analyzing *Trese* through the combined lenses of

postcolonial theory and symbolic interactionism. Building on the theoretical framework and methodological approach outlined in the preceding chapters, the analysis addresses the four research questions by examining how the series constructs postcolonial world-building, hybrid subjectivity, socially negotiated heroism, and reconfigured Filipino hero archetypes. Rather than treating these dimensions as isolated, the discussion demonstrates how they intersect to produce a distinctly Filipino narrative of power, identity, and resistance within a global media context.

Postcolonial world-building and institutional hybridity

At its core, *Trese* presents Manila as a postcolonial city shaped by centuries of cultural collision, where modern institutions coexist uneasily with indigenous mythologies. The series situates its narrative within an urban landscape that functions as what Bhabha conceptualizes as a Third Space. On this site, meanings are produced through negotiation rather than fixed tradition. Manila in *Trese* is not merely a backdrop, but an active narrative agent that reflects the tensions of postcolonial modernity.

The city operates simultaneously under bureaucratic governance and supernatural regulation. Police stations, morgues, and government offices exist alongside diwatas, aswangs, and other folkloric beings, suggesting that modern state authority has not entirely displaced precolonial belief systems. Instead, these systems overlap and conflict, producing an institutional hybridity that mirrors the Philippine postcolonial condition. As Manansala (2018) argues, *Trese*'s urban spaces function as heterotopic zones where different orders of reality coexist, revealing the fragility of modern governance when confronted with unresolved cultural histories.

Importantly, justice in *Trese* is not monopolized by the state. While police officers frequently initiate investigations, they repeatedly defer to Alexandra Trese to resolve cases involving supernatural forces. This reliance on an informal mediator exposes the limitations of colonial legal frameworks imposed upon a society whose cultural logic exceeds them. The series thus critiques the lingering dominance of imported bureaucratic systems that fail to account for indigenous

epistemologies. Rafael (2005) similarly argues that Philippine modernity is shaped by unresolved processes of translation between colonial institutions and indigenous epistemologies, resulting in cultural configurations where myth and memory persist within, rather than outside, modern structures.

Colonial residues are embedded not only in institutions but also in social hierarchies. Supernatural beings are often marginalized, surveilled, or violently suppressed, echoing historical patterns of colonial domination and racialized othering. Even within the supernatural realm, power is unevenly distributed, reinforcing the idea that colonial logic persists through both human and non-human structures. Through this layered depiction of Manila, *Trese* constructs a world that is neither wholly modern nor purely indigenous, but structurally hybrid—a postcolonial city struggling to reconcile its fractured foundations.

Alexandra Trese as a structurally hybrid subject

Alexandra Trese stands at the center of this hybrid world as a character shaped by competing legacies of power, belief, and responsibility. Her subjectivity is forged through a lineage that embodies the contradictions of postcolonial inheritance. Raised by Anton Trese, a figure associated with militaristic authority and uncompromising violence, Alexandra is taught to view order as something that must be enforced through dominance. This worldview reflects internalized colonial values, where control and hierarchy are privileged over dialogue and balance.

In contrast, Alexandra's mother, Miranda, represents a precolonial ethos rooted in healing, restraint, and harmony. Miranda's influence offers an alternative model of power—one grounded in compassion rather than coercion. Her eventual sacrifice underscores the historical marginalization of indigenous knowledge systems under colonial rule, yet her teachings persist as a moral counterweight within Alexandra's psyche. This dual inheritance situates Alexandra as a structurally hybrid subject, embodying what Bhabha (1994) describes as the ambivalence of postcolonial identity.

Alexandra's ambivalence toward violence becomes most evident in moments where she chooses restraint over lethal force. Her encounters with

supernatural adversaries often begin with aggression, reflecting her father's teachings, but end with mercy or negotiation. These moments illustrate how she does not simply oscillate between two moral frameworks but actively negotiates a hybrid ethic that resists absolutism. This negotiation exemplifies mimicry—not as passive imitation of dominant forms, but as a strategic adaptation that exposes their limitations (Bhabha, 1994).

Her relationship with the half-aswang twins, Crispin and Basilio, further deepens this analysis. Initially rejecting them due to inherited prejudices, Alexandra reproduces the same logic of exclusion used by colonial powers to marginalize the "other." However, her eventual acceptance of the twins signals a moment of decolonization, where hybridity is no longer perceived as contamination but as a source of relational belonging. This mode of heroism resonates with what Brillón (2021) identifies in Filipino superhero narratives such as *Darna*, where hybridity emerges not as a weakness but as a structural condition of marginality—one that enables local heroes to negotiate global genre conventions while remaining rooted in indigenous cultural logics.

Through Alexandra, *Trese* portrays postcolonial subjectivity not as a resolved identity but as an ongoing struggle. Her hybridity is not a weakness to be overcome but the very condition that enables her to function within a fractured world.

Symbolic interaction and the social production of hero identity

While Alexandra's hybridity explains her structural positioning, her identity as a hero is produced through social interaction. Drawing from symbolic interactionism, heroism in *Trese* emerges not as an intrinsic trait but as a role negotiated through repeated encounters with others (Blumer, 1969). Alexandra's authority is continually affirmed, contested, and reshaped through her interactions with police officers, supernatural beings, and civilians.

Law enforcement figures frequently defer to Alexandra, implicitly acknowledging her expertise while also reinforcing the inadequacy of formal institutions. Supernatural entities, on the other hand, recognize her authority through ritualized respect or resistance, framing her as a mediator rather than an

enforcer. Civil society views her with a mix of fear, reverence, and expectation, projecting onto her the burden of maintaining balance. Through these interactions, Alexandra internalizes and adjusts her understanding of what it means to be a hero.

Her silence, emotional restraint, and composed demeanor function as symbolic resources that reinforce her role. Unlike Western heroes who assert dominance through spectacle or verbal assertion, Alexandra's authority is communicated through minimalism. Mead's (1934) concept of the self as emerging through social interaction is evident here: Alexandra's identity is shaped not by internal monologue alone, but by how others respond to her presence and actions.

Thus, heroism in *Trese* is socially produced rather than narratively bestowed. Alexandra becomes a hero not because she claims the title, but because her role is repeatedly enacted and validated through interaction.

Reconfiguring Filipino hero archetypes

Traditional Filipino hero archetypes have often emphasized masculinity, moral absolutism, and nationalist symbolism (Brillón, 2021). Figures such as the revolutionary hero or the mythic warrior are typically defined by physical prowess, moral clarity, and sacrificial nationalism. *Trese* reworks these archetypes by presenting a hero whose authority is relational, negotiated, and ethically complex.

Alexandra Trese challenges masculine norms through her quiet strength and emotional restraint, rejecting performative dominance in favor of measured action. Her moral framework is situational rather than absolute, reflecting a postcolonial sensibility attuned to context and consequence. National identity in *Trese* is expressed not through overt symbolism but through engagement with local myth, urban space, and everyday struggles.

Rather than rejecting Filipino heroic tradition, *Trese* reconfigures it. As Mehta and Mukherji (2015) argue, postcolonial comics often transform heroic forms by embedding them within hybrid narrative structures. Alexandra's heroism emerges as a negotiated role that reflects contemporary Filipino realities—marked by hybridity, ambivalence, and ongoing cultural negotiation.

Table 1 Summary of analytical findings on postcolonial identity and heroism in *Trese*

Research focus/RQ	Analytical lens	Core analytical dimension	Key findings	Interpretive significance
Postcolonial world-building and institutional hybridity (RQ1)	Bhabha's Postcolonial Theory	Manila as Third Space: institutional overlap	<i>Trese</i> constructs Manila as a postcolonial Third Space where modern bureaucracy and indigenous myth coexist and conflict. Police, supernatural governance, and informal justice operate in parallel, revealing the limits of colonial legal frameworks and the persistence of indigenous epistemologies.	World-building reflects unresolved colonial translation, positioning the city itself as an agent of postcolonial negotiation rather than a neutral setting.
Colonial residue in governance and hierarchy (RQ1)	Bhabha's Postcolonial Theory	Power, marginalization, and surveillance	Colonial logic persists through institutional hierarchies and social ordering, evident in the marginalization and regulation of supernatural beings. Power remains unevenly distributed across both human and non-human actors.	Demonstrates that postcolonial hybridity is structured by inequality, not harmonious coexistence.
Alexandra Trese as a structurally hybrid subject (RQ2)	Bhabha: Hybridity, ambivalence, mimicry	Lineage, inheritance, moral conflict	Alexandra embodies conflicting colonial and precolonial legacies through her parents. Her ambivalence toward violence reflects a negotiated ethical position rather than moral certainty.	Postcolonial subjectivity is shown as an ongoing struggle shaped by inheritance rather than a resolved identity.

Research focus/RQ	Analytical lens	Core analytical dimension	Key findings	Interpretive significance
Mimicry and negotiated heroism (RQ2)	Bhabha: Mimicry	Global hero tropes with local inflection	Alexandra partially adopts global hero forms (detective, enforcer) without complete assimilation, reworking them through restraint, negotiation, and relational ethics.	Hybridity functions as a strategic adaptation, exposing the limits of dominant heroic forms.
Symbolic interaction and hero identity formation (RQ3)	Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism	Role-taking; social expectation; response	Alexandra's hero identity is produced through interaction with police, supernatural beings, and civilians. Authority is conferred, contested, and reaffirmed relationally rather than assumed.	Heroism is socially enacted, not narratively bestowed or intrinsically possessed.
Symbolic resources and demeanor (RQ3)	Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism	Silence, restraint, minimalism	Alexandra's silence and emotional restraint function as symbolic resources that stabilize her heroic role. Identity emerges through others' responses rather than self-assertion.	Challenges dominant Western heroic models based on spectacle and verbal dominance.
Reconfiguration of Filipino hero archetypes (RQ4)	Bhabha's Postcolonial Theory	Gender, morality, nationalism	<i>These</i> reworks Filipino hero archetypes by shifting away from masculinity, moral absolutism, and nationalist spectacle toward relational authority and ethical complexity.	Demonstrates continuity with, rather than rejection of, Filipino heroic tradition through hybrid transformation.
Postcolonial heroism under global media conditions (RQ4)	Integrated Bhabha–Blumer framework	Hybridity + interaction	Alexandra's heroism emerges at the intersection of	Positions <i>These</i> as a model of negotiated postcolonial

Research focus/RQ	Analytical lens	Core analytical dimension	Key findings	Interpretive significance
			structural postcolonial conditions and social interaction, reflecting negotiated cultural identity within global media circulation.	visibility rather than total resistance or assimilation.

This section demonstrates that *Trese* articulates a form of postcolonial heroism rooted in hybridity and social interaction. By integrating Bhabha’s postcolonial theory with Blumer’s symbolic interactionism, the analysis reveals how world-building, subjectivity, and heroism are co-constructed within a global media landscape. The following chapter will further contextualize these findings within broader discussions of postcolonial media, global streaming, and Filipino cultural identity.

Discussion

This chapter situates the findings of the study within broader theoretical and cultural conversations. Rather than reiterating specific analytical observations, the discussion focuses on the implications of the study’s integrative framework and the significance of *Trese* as a postcolonial cultural text circulating within global streaming infrastructures. In doing so, it highlights both the conceptual contributions of combining postcolonial theory and symbolic interactionism and the limits of cultural resistance under platform capitalism.

Theoretical contributions

One of the central contributions of this study lies in its integration of Homi K. Bhabha’s postcolonial theory with Herbert Blumer’s symbolic interactionism. While postcolonial studies have extensively examined hybridity, ambivalence, and cultural negotiation, these concepts are often applied at a structural or discursive level, leaving less room for analyzing how such conditions are lived, enacted, and stabilized through social interaction. By incorporating symbolic interactionism, this study demonstrates that hybridity is not only a structural condition produced by colonial history and global cultural flows but also an enacted

process that unfolds through role-taking, interaction, and meaning-making.

Through this combined framework, the analysis shows how *Trese* articulates hybridity simultaneously at the level of world-building and character identity. Bhabha’s theory explains why Manila emerges as a Third Space shaped by overlapping systems of authority. In contrast, Blumer’s framework explains how Alexandra Trese navigates this space by negotiating her role as mediator, enforcer, and moral agent. Hybridity thus appears not as an abstract theoretical category, but as a dynamic process that is continuously affirmed, contested, and revised through interaction.

This synthesis also extends postcolonial hero studies by moving beyond representational binaries such as resistance versus assimilation. Alexandra Trese’s heroism does not resolve postcolonial tension; instead, it sustains it. Her identity remains ambivalent, relational, and context-dependent, illustrating how postcolonial subjects operate within constraints rather than outside them. In this sense, the study contributes to ongoing efforts to bridge macro-level postcolonial critique with micro-level analyses of identity formation, demonstrating the value of interdisciplinary theoretical integration for media and cultural studies.

Implications for global streaming and cultural identity

Beyond its theoretical contributions, this study offers insights into the cultural politics of global streaming platforms. *Trese* exemplifies what may be described as negotiated postcolonial visibility—a form of representation that gains global circulation while remaining shaped by platform-specific demands for genre familiarity, narrative clarity, and marketability.

(Karim, 2025) observes, streaming platforms such as Netflix expand access to local stories but also structure the conditions under which those stories are told.

Within this context, *Trese* achieves visibility by translating Filipino folklore and urban anxieties into globally recognizable genre forms, particularly noir and animated fantasy. This translation enables cultural circulation, yet it also introduces constraints. Certain complexities of Philippine history and belief are streamlined or symbolically displaced to ensure legibility for international audiences. As Shah (2020) notes in their analysis of postcolonial graphic narratives, such negotiations are characteristic of cultural texts operating within globalized media economies.

Importantly, the findings suggest that while *Trese* resists total cultural homogenization, its resistance is partial and conditional. The series does not overturn global genre hierarchies or platform logics; instead, it works within them, appropriating their forms to articulate localized meaning. This underscores the limits of resistance under platform capitalism, where creative agency exists but remains circumscribed by institutional power.

In this light, *Trese* should be understood neither as a fully emancipatory postcolonial text nor as a commodified cultural product devoid of critical potential. Instead, it occupies an in-between position—one that reflects the realities of contemporary postcolonial cultural production. Its significance lies precisely in this negotiation, revealing how cultural identity is reworked, rather than resolved, in the age of global streaming.

The discussion underscores that *Trese* offers more than representation; it provides a case study in how postcolonial identity, heroism, and cultural meaning are shaped under contemporary media conditions. The concluding chapter will synthesize these insights, address the study's limitations, and suggest directions for future research on postcolonial media, global platforms, and hybrid cultural forms.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine *Trese* as a postcolonial cultural text that negotiates Filipino identity, heroism, and world-building within the conditions of global streaming. Drawing on Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory and Herbert Blumer's

symbolic interactionism, the analysis demonstrated how hybridity operates not only as a structural condition shaped by colonial history and global media flows, but also as a lived and enacted process sustained through social interaction and symbolic meaning.

The findings reveal that *Trese* constructs Manila as a postcolonial Third Space where myth, bureaucracy, and informal justice coexist, exposing the limitations of modern institutions in addressing culturally specific forms of order. This world-building reflects enduring colonial residues while simultaneously enabling alternative modes of governance grounded in indigenous epistemologies.

At the level of character, Alexandra Trese emerges as a structurally hybrid subject whose identity is shaped by conflicting inheritances of authority, morality, and power. Her ambivalence toward violence and justice illustrates how postcolonial subjectivity resists moral absolutism. Through symbolic interaction, Alexandra's heroism is socially produced rather than inherently possessed, negotiated through her interactions with police, supernatural beings, and civil society.

Finally, the study shows that *Trese* reconfigures Filipino hero archetypes by shifting heroism away from masculinity and nationalist spectacle toward relational authority, ethical restraint, and contextual negotiation. In doing so, the series offers a contemporary model of Filipino heroism that reflects postcolonial complexity rather than heroic certainty.

While this study provides a theoretically grounded textual analysis, it is limited by its focus on representation rather than reception. Future research could incorporate audience studies to examine how local and international viewers interpret *Trese*'s postcolonial themes and hybrid heroism, particularly in relation to cultural legibility and identification.

Additionally, this study centers on a single Filipino case. Comparative research involving Southeast Asian media texts—such as Indonesian, Thai, or Malaysian myth-based series—could offer broader insights into how postcolonial hybridity and heroism are articulated across regional contexts within global streaming platforms. Such comparative work would deepen understanding of how localized cultural identities are negotiated under shared platform conditions while remaining shaped by distinct historical and cultural trajectories.

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Declaration of generative AI in scientific writing

The authors disclose that generative AI and AI-assisted tools were utilized during the preparation of this manuscript. ChatGPT was used to support language refinement and improve textual flow, while Grammarly assisted with grammar, spelling, citation formatting, and other technical aspects of writing. All analytical interpretations, theoretical arguments, and conclusions presented in this work are solely the authors' own. The authors assume full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and scholarly content of the manuscript.

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