A Descriptive Analysis of Post-Colonial Residue

Ronald E. Hall

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Travel brochures to the exotic islands of the Philippines aptly profess the rich variation in land and the beauty of its people. Vacationing tourists are impressed by the seeming lack of discrimination to which residents proudly attest. Unmentionable, however, is a very subtle but no less egregious preference for mestizo light skin. The existence of such idealization is invisible to the casual observer, but is immune to dispute in the aftermath of Spanish colonization and American occupation.

By scientific explanation, attractiveness culminates in idealized differential concentrations of gene frequencies responsible for various observable physical traits including skin color (Hall 1996). As far as scholars can determine skin color has no substantiated parallel to culture, intelligence, or institutions. There exists no superior skin color, as variation in tone is void of any biological significance. Without vision, the color of one's skin cannot be determined, but its implications via alternative communication remains constant in the absence of sight. Considering the biological function of skin, light skin has no fundamental dimension which dark skin does not have. Light skin has no innately distinct superiority that would set it apart from dark skin. Conversely, of all the physical dimensions characteristic of the human population, light skin has emerged consequent to Western domination as the ideal. Subsequently it is the stigmatization of dark skin and the idealization of light skin that has made the difference in what Filipinos prefer in self, and/or potential significant other.

Aside from the idealization of light skin, its status value among Filipinos has thrived in the modern era, being a residue of Spanish colonization (Whitsett & Whitsett 1996). Volumes of literature have had little impact in facilitating its demise. Contributing to the igno-
rance, scholars have avoided investigating the effects of colonization upon people of color out of sympathy for their victimization. In fact, as per the idealization of light skin, colonial residues are a social impediment to a more viable Filipino self-concept (Stember 1976; Hall 1995). About the accuracy of this assumption there should be no doubt. Notwithstanding, to characterize colonization in solely a Western perpetrator context does disservice to the scientific method. It enables the rhetoric of hierarchy within a single ethnic group. It provides a conduit for the continued social, economic, and political oppression of people of color worldwide. However deserving of sympathy, the role of victims cannot be ignored. While investigating their undertaking may not be popular or politically correct, to do so regardless is what distinguishes science from quackery (Steiner 1987; Aro 1995; Morris 1992).

Review of Literature

The idealization of light skin by way of colonization has a long history among Asian populations. It extends to India where light-skinned peoples called Aryans conquered Indians in 1500–500 B.C. The Aryans were a people regarded as “uncivilized” but were in fact superior warriors. Over several centuries they vanquished the dark-skinned indigenous folk and took ownership of their land. By the late Vedic period, 1000–500 B.C., Aryans were in complete control of India (Kolenda 1978). Several centuries later, India was visited once again by light-skinned invaders whose objective was colonial conquest. Similar to Aryans in color, the lighter-skinned British colonials no doubt left an indelible impression upon the Indian-Asian psyche. It is manifest today in the idealization of light skin among Indians at home and abroad.

As an historical phenomenon, the idealization of light skin in India has persisted in stagnating the social evolution of its people. Among the people, idealization was served by colonial occupation and status differentiation. In this context, Indian idealization of light skin overlapped with the caste hierarchy thusly defined as: “the efforts of a dominant group to exclude a dominated group from sharing in the material and symbolic rewards of status and power” (Tidwell 1990–91). It differs from other forms of hierarchy in that qualification is based upon the inclusion of observable and assumed physiological traits (Wilson 1992). Such traits today imply the inherent idealization of light-skinned castes, which are then rationalized as a natural order of the Indian biological status system (Brinson 1995).
Among Indian-Asian women, the idealization of light skin has been all but ignored in scholarly literature. In fact, such women manifest behaviors on the basis of skin color, whereby those having light skin presume the social and psychological demeanor of an upper caste (Randolph 1995). It is pseudo racism, in which victims engage behaviors of the perpetrator. Such manifestation of ideals by Indians is directed at dark-skinned persons—particularly of African descent (Washington 1990).

Filipinos are regarded by modern anthropologists as Asian. According to these anthropologists there exist among Filipinos three early primary racial stocks, which complies with their characterization as dark-skinned. They consist of the Negrito, the proto-Malay, and the Malaysian (Wernstedt & Spenser 1967). Northern Asians, Indonesians, Indian-Asians, Spaniards, and Euro-Americans were later contributors to the racial miscegenation and skin color variations characteristic of Filipinos today. Even so it would appear that the predominance of today's Filipinos are of Malaysian or Indonesian stock at least by their dark-skinned appearance. Spanish colonials regarded the original Filipinos as simply "little black people" hence negrito (Wernstedt & Spenser 1967). Little black people looked more like contemporary African-Americans, which probably contributed to the refusal of African-American soldiers in the Spanish-American War to fire upon them. The largest element of the Filipino population the Spanish called indios. In the far south lived people the Spanish called moros who were Moslems and traditionally at odds with Spain.

The empathy of African-Americans for Filipinos is justified in that the original natives are in fact dark-skinned members of Negroid racial stock. Early on they were dispersed throughout various parts of the country. In both stature and appearance Negritos are similar to African pygmies. Most are less than five feet tall, have kinky hair and dark skin. They are a migrant people making their living by hunting and gathering. They have in most instances been abused and stigmatized by the arrival of more sedentary cultural groups such as the Spanish, who restricted their land occupation.

Spanish colonization initiated a decline in the Negrito population that today renders them all but non-existent. As a testament to the racial tolerance of the native Filipino people, Negrito blood was once spread throughout the nation. However, today in a post-colonial era less miscegenation by Negritos is taking place as Negrito dark skin seems less and less tolerated or perhaps more stigmatized.
Human bias on some basis is as old as civilization itself (Winston 1998). However, as criteria of Filipino ideals it has been all but ignored. Furthermore, among Filipinos, current manifestation of skin color ideals are the direct result of having been militarily colonized by Europeans from Spain and socially colonized by Euro-Americans from the mainland (Delano-Buono 1991). Following their various acts of influence with reference to the Philippines' cultural mores, the alien presence introduced a status hierarchy to discourage any notions of merit attributable to dark-skinned people or people otherwise dissimilar in appearance to Europeans (Hall 1992). The uppermost in status were idealized as those whose color most approximates that of the lighter-skinned Spaniards and the least being an opposite extreme (Hall 1994). For such a heterogeneous group as Filipinos, the effort to maintain doctrines of racial purity did not evolve with the same vigor as was characteristic of the West. While discrimination is not totally irrelevant to Philippine society, by Western standards it is much less potent. In the absence of a virulent race tradition light skin emerged among Filipinos as the most forceful criteria in the collage of desired physical characteristics.

Upon their arrival in the Philippines, Spanish colonials had visualized a Filipina prototype that would best serve the exploitation and subjugation of Filipino people. They required that the Filipina be demure, modest, patient, devoutly religious, cultured, submissive, and virginal. In status she would be valued commensurate with the quantity of Western blood that ran through her veins. That blood quantity corresponded with light skin. Spanish ancestry was important because it would vary Filipino skin color, accordingly making it increasingly lighter by sexual contact with the Western male. The impact of this dynamic is repressed in the Filipina psyche, making her for the most part unaware of its significance and ultimately an accessory to her own victimization.

Indicative of post-colonization, Spanish fantasies of the Filipina ideal are upheld today, enabling impediments to Filipina liberation and psychological health. Colonial fantasies served the purposes of Spaniards whose colonial presence reinforced light skin criteria. Perhaps some very minor progress might be assessed in that the indigenous people of the Philippines who once embraced indio as the ethnic nomenclature assigned to them by the Spanish now insist upon Filipino, while the descendants of colonizers prefer to call themselves Spanish (McGloin 1992).
Colonial contact between Filipinos and the West was characterized by an obvious differential in power. These contacts in the beginning were rigid and structured as pertains to sex, race, and various cultural prescriptions of appropriate behavior. Social scientists have noted with keen interest the impact of such relationships upon the present ideals of Filipinos as pertains to light skin. That is, in the aftermath of Spanish colonization and American occupation the ideal of native dark skin has given way to light skin vis-à-vis Spanish/American influence. Furthermore, following the predominance of race in the West where the Caucasian is canonized, migrant Filipinas—as per eurogamy—seek Caucasian husbands in hopes of giving birth to mestizo children. Because mestizo children are more often light-skinned, in the post-colonial era they approximate the new Filipino ideal.

Free and uninhibited matrimony would view the selection of marriage partners as an indicator that race would not be a barrier (Aguirre, Suenz & Hwang 1995). An alternate approach would infer exogamy as a function of inequality in dominant and racially stratified societies, i.e.: the West. For Filipinos who practice exogamy, marriage then becomes a vehicle for the exchange of status characteristics (Shinagawa & Pang 1988; Kitano, Yeung & Hatanaka, 1984). Persons who practice selective exogamy engage in “eurogamy.” Eurogamy is a post-colonial phenomenon that pertains to marital patterns, limited to members of dominant European ethnic groups (Hall 1997).

In an attempt to illustrate the extent of eurogamy a random magazine sample of mail order brides for years 1991–2000 (one issue for each year) was utilized. Listed were a total of approximately 620 girls ages eighteen to thirty. The groups included Filipinas, Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Indonesian, Malaysian and others, to accommodate an occasional Russian, for example. For the most part race was not a significant aspect of the girls’ requirement for correspondence. However of those who mentioned race, approximately 96 percent requested Caucasian men, 2 percent requested Asian men and 2 percent requested Hispanic men. The most Caucasian select of the group were by far the Chinese (30 percent), the Japanese (27 percent) and the Koreans (14 percent). This would concur with the reputation of northern Asians as culturally inclined to rank human groups by skin color. Indonesian and Malaysian women, a much darker group, requested Caucasian as well (12 percent). Of the total Indonesian/Malaysian group one requested “no blondes please.” As to Filipinas, specifically
11 percent requested Caucasian men and 2 percent requested Hispanic men. In the aftermath of colonization and otherwise Western world dominance, it would appear that an increasing idealization of light skin is progressively forthcoming. While some Filipinas do marry dark-skinned people of color, Filipino males who marry exogamously are less likely than is evident of females (Rhee 1988). Filipinos in their homeland are physically dissimilar in such a way that each group faction contributes to a full range of skin colors including dark (Kim & Chun 1994; Saha 1993). The seeming contradiction between Filipino skin color and skin color ideals beseech investigation from which fact might be distilled from discrepancy.

Methodology

Within their social environment permeated by post-colonial ideals, Filipinos have been no less susceptible to that which approximates the idealization of light skin. An effort to determine the existence of this idealization among residents of the Philippines was attempted. Using a sample of local Filipino college students, the following null hypothesis was formulated to provide a context for investigating the problem: “There is no relationship between skin color and selected values for skin color ideals.” The sample consisted of 256 participants surveyed in the Manila area during the 2000 school year. Respondents had a reported mean age of 18.5 years. A self-report instrument available in English was utilized for measuring their skin color. Called the Cutaneo-Chroma-Correlate, this instrument was developed and previously pilot-tested by the researcher to assess the relationship between skin color and various aspects of skin color ideals vis-à-vis sections “A” “B” and “C” (Hall 1990). Section “B” (of the CCC) was used in this study to assess the respondent’s personal values pertaining to the idealization of light skin. In differentiating responses, a designation of lightest was noted as 5, light as 4, medium as 3, dark as 2, and darkest as 1 (table 1).

Summary of Results

Section B of the CCC administered to college students in the Philippines consisted of a total of fifteen queries. The total number of responses to such queries was 3,734, which included a range total of 53. The sum of responses by N totaled 10,454. The mean score of all means (15) was 2.80. The maximum skin color measure being 5, very
light, light, medium, dark and very dark was collapsed into light and
dark categories. A score of 2.50 was calculated as the cut-off between
dark and light skin color categories (light skin > 2.50, dark skin < 2.50).
Dark skin was preferred as per item 17 ("The skin color of the man
women like is") and 19 ("The skin color of smart Asians is") at a mean
of 2.44 and 2.19 respectively. All other item means (15, 16, 18, 20, 21,
22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29) exceeded a 2.50 mean calculated as light
skin. The highest mean (3.47) was calculated for item 26 ("The skin
color of my race [Asian] should be"). A mean of 3.08 was calculated
for item 27 ("The skin color of Asians who are physically strong is")
and 3.05 for item 20 ("The skin color of Asians who are snobs is").
Referring to the aforementioned descriptive data, it would appear with
some reservation that light skin is ideally valued among respondents
to whom the test was administered in the Philippines.

Table 1
Begin Section "B"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section B</th>
<th>(A)</th>
<th>(B)</th>
<th>(C)</th>
<th>(D)</th>
<th>(E)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Very Dark</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Directions: Section B consists of 15 items that will collect information about
your personal values. Express your preferences about Asians by
shading ON THE ANSWER SHEET, your choice from the above
codes.

15. Pretty skin is
16. The skin color of pretty women is
17. The skin color of the man women like is
18. I wish my skin color was
19. The skin color of smart Asians is
20. The skin color of Asians who are snobs is
21. The skin color of Asians who are kind is
22. The skin color of my best friend is
23. I want my child(ren)'s skin color to be
24. My ideal spouse's skin color is
25. The skin color of my family should be
26. The skin color of my race (Asian) should be
27. The skin color of Asians who are physically strong is
28. The skin color of Asians who are dumb is
29. The ideal skin color of my child(ren)'s spouse/s is
ANALYSIS OF POST-COLONIAL RESIDUE

Discussion

According to these data, the presumption of a relationship between skin color and selected values for skin color ideals is plausible. The mean total was 2.80 for all 15 items. This score exceeded the light skin cut-off suggesting an idealization of light skin among those respondents tested. There are then implications for light skin as an idealized physical trait. This conclusion would illuminate the perception of light skin in the milieu of the population questioned. Dark skin—as per queries 17 and 19—was preferred only in Filipino men and smart Asians. These findings would appear to contradict—or at least challenge—the presumption of group indifference to color. It also implies a reflection of continuing and pervasive post-colonial residues that stigmatize persons characterized by dark skin in all other item categories. It is a stigmatization that can be described as a product of Western colonization exhibited by the West toward all people of color. Among world powers where whiteness is ideal, light skin invariably

Results

Table 2

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Query</th>
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</table>
represents the aesthetic standard. The scores of Filipino students, on section “B” of the CCC test, suggested their tendency to appreciate selected ideals in self and others on the basis of color preferences. Such appreciation could be used to assess status and social worth, thereby contributing to the perpetuation of post-colonial residue in an otherwise tolerant Filipino racial environment.

Individual and group analysis must reconsider the various cultural criteria of the Filipino milieu. Students—Filipino and others—will then be better qualified to assess the personal values and sort out negative messages in the social environment that inhibit developmental potential. This will enable the evolution of more conducive coping strategies and adaptive behaviors. Particular attention needs to be given to assisting dark-skinned Filipinos and all people of color to develop a broader range of ego protection mechanisms. Students must acquire the knowledge to construct a psychological safety zone for those stigmatized by their skin color as they challenge the internalized color ideals and projective identifications, especially those pertaining to the associations of dark skin with less than ideal. Additionally, family and community projection processes regarding skin color must necessarily be explored as dark-skinned Filipinos may need to mend emotional disconnects that weaken their systems of support. If this proves a viable strategy those affected must have a chance to explore some of the color issues in both public and private venues.

An imperative conclusion commencing with post-colonial Philippines is that in spite of a multitude of socio-historical obstacles, many dark-skinned Filipinos continue to thrive in a less than idyllic social environment providing support to their children, families and communities. Yet, in spite of the stabilizing, powerful, and constructive influences that many dark-skinned Filipinos have upon the various systems, routine micro and macro efforts largely deny or ignore the existence of the light skin ideal. There can then be little doubt that current scholarship is unwittingly fueled by public perception that distorts a subtle but complex dynamic in the post-colonial milieu of Filipino people.

Filipino scholars and students alike habitually minimize the ecological significance of the impact of skin color upon families, groups and communities. Succinctly put genograms, sociograms and ecomaps too often reject the emotional consequence of the skin color issue among Filipinos and other people of color. Scholars must comprehend the taboo nature of the issue to accommodate its resolution. Seldom ac-
knowned is the impact of skin color upon an emotional system that exerts a powerful, but not always apparent, force upon the collective or dyadic relationship systems native to the Philippines.

With few exceptions, the marginalization of the skin color phenomena is in part a manifestation of academic tradition, particularly in the most widely read scholarly literature. Contrary to commonly held opinions, not all Filipinos i.e.: Spanish adhere to racial tolerance. As the data suggests, skin color for Filipinos potentially functions as an impediment to their group cohesion and psychological well-being. Scholars must acknowledge this issue in education in order to be more effective in the field. Institutions must also reframe their approach to tolerance among people of color to go beyond concerns for Western racism so that they may facilitate healthy, functional behavior in the local Filipino population.

Conclusion

Light skin as a manifestation of colonial ideals was less potent in the Philippines prior to Western colonization. This notion accommodates assertions of racial harmony there. The Philippines’ multi-colored native population contrasts with the distinct racial groups characteristic of the U.S. and elsewhere in the West. Despite the fact, Filipino institutions in the shadow of Western influence, harbor concepts of beauty and attractiveness that are more European and less Filipino in substance. Their strict adherence to European ideals merits further investigation. Moreover, empirical evidence to substantiate the necessity of any single criteria for the assessment of Philippine residents analogous to the West in toto is lacking (Hero & Tolbert 1996). The inviolability of the Filipino academy is thus put at risk. A prevailing urgency then obliges the appurtenance of light skin as descriptive alternative to race-based colonial traditions.

All matters considered, it would appear that the idealization of light skin is a vehicle of attractiveness in Filipino society (Kitano 1985). Some insist the Philippines is a completely color blind sovereignty. By local standards light skin is not determined to be as important a measure of social status as is class (Kitano 1985). Filipinos at home and abroad are among the most accepting and racially tolerant members in all of humanity. However, there exists a direct correlation inherent of dark skin and lower socioeconomic status. Furthermore, in local mores Filipinos idealize mestizo offspring as it is believed that their light skin makes them more attractive (Kitano 1985).
The postmodernist movement holds potential for rescuing Filipinos from the classic rigidity of the social science academy (Capra 1988). It will enable the incorporation and validation of new information. To the contrary, maintenance of classic theory and sanctity of same, discourages evolution and new ways of thinking. The traditions of academic social science organizations, unlike the hard sciences, too often defer to individual stature or organizational reference for the validation of theoretical information. As a result, all of social science has incorrectly viewed the domains of colonization as less relevant to people of color, including Filipinos, save for victimization. In fact the idealization of light skin is an ecological reality in the social milieu of Filipinos and will become increasingly so in the new millennium. Any professional oversight is especially regrettable for dark-skinned Filipinos and other people of color similarly characterized. What’s more, in the annals of history exist documentation that suggests social action precedes the resurrection of subjugated knowledge pertaining to light skin as ideal (Foucault 1980). Filipino scholars are then challenged to decipher the maze of tradition and create a suitable environment for knowledge based purely upon merit in order to resurrect the indigenous wisdom that preceded the post-colonial experiences of otherwise victim populations.

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