

Concerning Constructions of Self and Other: Auto-racism and Imagining *Amerika* in the Christian Philippines

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Abstract: The term ‘colonial mentality’ is popularly used among many Filipinos to refer to a tendency to compare themselves negatively to *Amerikanos*. This paper explores the everyday form such deprecating self/other constructions take on the island of Siquijor in the Central Visayas region of the archipelago. It sheds light on how these constructions are socially situated, deployed and reproduced, their limits and their effects. It shows that comparisons between categories of Filipino and *Amerikano* must be understood in relation to *local* hierarchies. On Siquijor, local imaginings of *Amerikano* lifestyles and bodies not only serve as reference points for ideals of affluence and beauty, but act as markers of prestige in competitions for status between neighbours and kin, sustaining a sense of *Amerikano* superordinancy. While, on Siquijor, superordinancy presumes neither innate nor moral superiority (and, indeed, there exists ambivalence towards the relative moral status of *Amerikanos* and Filipinos), there is a strong presumption specifically that the ‘failure’ of the Philippines to achieve similar levels of affluence to the US is due to moral deficiencies of the Filipino self. Thus, outward-looking desire is contained by inward-looking discontent, the latter keeping the former from spilling over into demands for change to a global status quo.

Keywords: Self and other; Colonial mentality; Auto-racism; United States; Philippines

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Introduction

Inday bounded into my hut one morning. In her mid-twenties, she was on a stint away from her work in the city, and was staying for a few months with her parents, who had a comfortable living running a business in one of the nearby towns. She would often visit me, releasing me from the plastic desk where I typed notes. We would usually have lunch together on my porch and whittle away the day's most languid hour or two in gossip and banter. But today her usual manner was amiss: her step was more of a stride; her hands were planted on her hips. We exchanged pleasantries as she paced the floor. I gave her an enquiring look, and she launched into an animated story of an encounter she had had that morning at one of the island's internet cafés.

Inday had met a woman at the café who asked her questions about the island. This led her to assume that the woman was not Siquijodnon – as natives of this Philippine island, Siquijor, call themselves. She asked the woman where she was from. 'Virginia' came the reply. 'But where are you from?' Inday repeated, thinking there had been some confusion. 'Virginia' the woman insisted. 'Fuck!' Inday cried to me in indignation. 'Why can't she just say where she's *actually* from?' Now I was confused. 'Why *wouldn't* she be from Virginia?' I asked. The woman, it seems, had Malay features. She spoke the local language, Cebuano, fluently, and her English rang with a Cebuano accent. She demonstrated some knowledge of Siquijor, and yet was asking Inday questions about the island as though it were alien to her. The woman's husband, Inday informed me, was 'white' and had mentioned that they were building a house on the island.

'If her husband's American, then she should say her husband is from Virginia, but not that she is!' Inday exclaimed. To Inday there was no question that the woman was Filipino, using her link with her husband to pretend to be American. Inday even suggested that the woman was from Siquijor, but was asking her questions about the island to disguise the fact. I suggested that she was probably born in the Philippines but had since migrated to the US and become a citizen. Inday expelled a breath with the impatience of someone trying to impart the obvious to a slow-witted child. 'Even so', she explained, 'she's still *just* a Filipino.'

Why was Inday so indignant that this woman would say she is from the US? It was more than the suggestion of a lie that Inday's conception of racial and national categories provoked. Had the woman said she was from Africa, Inday may have been perplexed, but she is unlikely to have been angry. On Siquijor a strong sense of American superordinancy

predominates, a fact that struck me time and time again throughout my fieldwork. Inday believed that this woman was saying she was from the US because it gave her a sense of superiority over her ‘actual’ fellow countrymen – Filipinos. Whether or not this was the case, it is clear that to Inday the difference was salient. In her imagination being American was, on some level, superior to being Filipino. She resented the status difference that this woman being from the US would represent – this woman who in many ways appeared just like her and therefore should not aspire to an elevated position.

Inday’s statement that the woman in the internet café was *just* a Filipino, despite her claims to being American, later rang in my mind as it was echoed by one of my neighbours. Joy, a nurse in her mid-forties, regularly assisted an elderly friend who grew up in the Philippines, but had lived for over four decades in the United States and had American citizenship. She related to me that he had a habit of scolding her in front of the household help. Fed up one day by his belligerent attitude towards her, she yelled at him: ‘Remember you are *just* a Filipino; you are not an American!’ Implicit in her reprimand was a statement that by virtue of his birth – or indeed his ‘race’ – he was not superior and was therefore not in a position to treat her in such a condescending manner. That someone of Filipino descent should use an affiliation with a Western country to assert superiority over Filipinos was strongly resisted. However, that a Caucasian should have such a sense of superiority was considered natural and elicited a combination of preferential treatment and, occasionally, underlying but discernible resentment. Inday one day referred to the sense of superiority I would (she assumed) have over Filipinos. When I asked her what she meant, she said ‘Well, don’t you feel superior?’ This was less of a question than a call for agreement; the tone implied that she felt it would be entirely natural for me to do so.

This paper examines what a number of Siquijodnon I spoke to reflexively referred to as their ‘colonial mentality’ – a tendency to negatively situate themselves in relation to ‘white’ people. Among my informants these negative self-assessments did not exist to the exclusion of positive self-assessments. Siquijodnon receive and (re)produce a range of evaluative discourses on self (relating to nationalist sentiment, tourism promotion, Christian doctrine and cosmetics advertising, for example). Different evaluative discourses take primacy in different contexts and articulate with others in complex ways. But as the labelling of the tendency suggests, self-deprecation in relation to white others is both prevalent and powerful. ‘Colonial mentality’ is, in fact, a term used throughout much of the Philippines as well as

among Filipino Americans (David and Okazaki 2006b, 11). Yet, the topic has received little systematic treatment among Philippines Studies scholars. There is a small but notable literature in the field of Filipino American Psychology (see, for example David 2011; David and Okazaki 2006, 2006b; Nadal 2011, 90; Rimonte 1997). There is also a scattered ethnographic literature on post-colonial self-denigration in other parts of the world, such as Melanesia (for example, see Bashkow 2006; Lattas 1998; Robbins and Wardlow 2005). My object here is to explore key ethnographically informed aspects of the nature of this ‘colonial mentality’ (or rather some of the key discourses united and reified by the term) as I encountered it on Siquijor and to consider its consequences. In the context of everyday local and global socio-economic processes, I consider the related issues of what such discourses are doing and how they are sustained in a post-colonial era. In particular, I suggest that, like racism, this kind of auto-racism can have malign effects in rationalising global inequality and averting challenges to the status quo.

This paper is informed by 18 months of ethnographic research I conducted on Siquijor in 2005, 2007 and 2012/3. Siquijor is a rural province-island in the Central Visayas region of the Philippines, with a population of around 91,000 according to the 2010 Census (the island takes less than two hours to circumnavigate by vehicle, making the population fairly dense for a rural island). Residents rely predominantly on subsistence agriculture, fishing, remittances and small-scale entrepreneurial activities. Ethnically Siquijodnon are *Bisaya* (Visayan in English) and as such constitute part of the most populous ethno-linguistic category in the Philippines. The vast majority of Siquijodnon classify themselves as Cebuano, a sub category of *Bisaya*, culturally and politically centring on the island of Cebu. Siquijor forms part of the dominant Christian lowlands and shares strong cultural continuities with other Christian lowland parts of the archipelago.

Siquijor is not characterised by the vast inequalities apparent in many other parts of the Philippines, although inequalities certainly exist. Most residents have access to some land where they can grow vegetables and raise animals. Landlords and public servants have, in the past, constituted the wealthier and more politically powerful strata of society on the island, but this has increasingly become complexified by widespread migration and remittances, which have produced marked wealth differences between previously equal neighbours. Much of this migration has been to: Cebu and Manila for retail and call centres jobs; to the Middle East, North America and other parts of Southeast Asia for employment as domestic helpers;

and to work as seamen on ships domestically and internationally. Aside from contact with migrated relatives, one of the main avenues for information about the outside world is through radio and television, which are widespread on the island. Siquijor also receives a trickle of tourists, although not enough to allow for most locals to have even semi-regular contact with foreigners.

My research on Siquijor centred on a coastal village of around 160 households, where I conducted (among other methods) extensive participant observation, a detailed census of the village, and dozens of semi-structured and open-ended interviews with a range of village residents. I also conducted interviews with Siquijodnon from various other coastal areas of the island. The fieldwork in 2005 and 2007 focused on local understandings of *kalamboan*, or ‘development’. I looked at the ways in which notions of development are implicated in life trajectories, individual and collective identities, explanatory frameworks and visions of the right order of things (Bulloch 2009). The fieldwork in 2012/13, focused on young women, intimate relationships and notions of personhood.ⁱⁱ

The Intimate Other

The United States, usually termed *Amerika* on Siquijor, occupies a pre-eminent position in Siquijodnon imaginings of the world beyond their archipelago. This stands even while Siquijodnon gain increasing first- or second-hand experience of other parts of the world – as noted, through migration in particular to the Middle East and parts of Southeast Asia beyond their archipelago and through tourism and popular media such as from South Korea. *Amerika* vastly overshadows the presence of Japan in their imaginations, which stands as a past invader, as it overshadows Spain, as a somewhat negligent but long vanquished coloniser. It is for this reason that this paper focuses on *Amerikanos*ⁱⁱⁱ as the principal other to which Siquijodnon compare themselves as Filipinos.

Importantly, however, in everyday discourse for many Siquijodnon, *Amerika* is a fairly loose concept synonymous with we might call the ‘West’ (as is the case throughout much of the Philippines (Lauser 2006: 322; Johnson 1998: 696)). But the concept of *Amerikanos* or Americans is, at once, much more limited. In its predominant usage it denotes certain phenotypical characteristics which, for Siquijodnon, are associated with – but do not map directly onto – nationality. The white person, regardless of country of origin, is *Amerikana/o* (Bulloch and Fabinyi 2009). Conversely, as a general rule, one must be white to fully qualify as *Amerikana/o* in this usage of the term.^{iv} So, for example, when I protested to Inday that I

was constantly being confused for an *Amerikana* when I am in fact a New Zealander, she stated that being a New Zealander did not stop me from *also* being an *Amerikana*, as I am still part of the *Amerikan race* (implicitly indicated by my Caucasian appearance). Meanwhile, an American who lived on the island for a time, born and bred in the United States and of Filipino descent, found herself pegged as *really* Filipino; whether her Caucasian husband of recent German descent was *really* American was never questioned. This is not to say that Siquijodnon who drew such judgements were consistently unaware that the US is a country made up of people of varied descent or that countries other than the US contain high proportions of white people. Rather, they distinguished between categories such as Filipino or *Amerikano* as extrinsic ‘technical’ labels of nationality, on the one hand, and as innate embodied statuses of race, on the other, depending on the context. Throughout the rest of this paper I use the term *Amerikano* as a Siquijodnon category denoting ‘Caucasian’ persons and *Amerika* to denote the ‘Western’ world, epitomised for Siquijodnon by the United States.

While for Siquijodnon *Amerika* effectively represents a (white) racial other, it is also understood as closely connected with the Filipino self. Indeed, a number of Filipinists go as far as to suggest that, through US colonisation, Filipinos came to think of themselves as Americanised or even American (Luspo 2001, 57; Leogardo and Navarro, quoted in Mulder 1996, 190; Orig 2002, 99; Rafael 2000, 208). Vicente Rafael (2000, 208) states that ‘Thanks to the Thomasites [American school teachers] and those who came in their wake, Filipinos were led to think of themselves as if they were North Americans; that is, as other than who they were supposed to be’. He quotes well-known Filipino journalist Conrado de Quiros: ‘Most of us are expatriates right *here* in our own land. America is our heartland whether we get to go there or not’ (Rafael 2000, 208). While I never had a sense that any of my Siquijodnon friends or acquaintances understood themselves as American or fully Americanised, they certainly identified with aspects of American culture – in their practice of Christianity, basketball and the English language, for example. And there was a very real sense that they felt they knew the US, that they were familiar with it. This preconceived familiarity with the US, particularly among townspeople, struck Jean-Paul Dumont (1992, 30) when he did fieldwork on Siquijor around 1980. He explains:

[T]hey did not relate to us as individuals but as Americans, according to a technically prejudicial and extraordinarily rigid preunderstanding of what the States was all about. Inasmuch as such an attitude left little or no room for our individual behaviours to contradict the model of America that they carried around with them, not only were we

objectified but we were preconceived as well. We were, from their viewpoint, the United States they had always 'known', at once experienced and imagined.

Through knowing the US, Siquijodnon in a way possess it; it becomes part of the self as a familiar object of discourse. At the same time much of what is 'known' of the US sets it up as a binary opposite of the Philippines, and in this regard the US is the principal other. Or perhaps more accurately an 'intimate alter' – a term which Bashkow (2006, 14) adapts from Ashis Nandy's (1983) 'intimate enemy', that is, 'the West internalised by its non-western others' (Bashkow 2006, 14). Paradoxically, then, the US is simultaneously part of the Siquijodnon self, yet quintessentially other.

Amerikanos are regularly contrasted with the Philippines in a number of ways in everyday discourse on Siquijor. The most ubiquitous among these relates to living standards; comparisons concerning physical appearance are also common. A brief description of each follows. Later in the paper I also consider some ways in which Siquijodnon compare *Amerikanos* morally to Filipinos.

Ideal Amerika

Amerika is, in certain ways, an idealised entity on Siquijor. It is the proverbial 'greener pastures' to which many of my informants referred (without conjuring any irony that the grass might always be 'greener on the other side'). Purged from the *Amerika* many of them imagined were hard work, poverty, inequality, violence, as well as the day-to-day discomforts of life. This was apparent in a number of the ways I, like Dumont, found myself to be preconceived. At times it manifested itself in statements of assumption; when I told people how hot it regularly got in the Australian city in which I had been living, the usual response was to point out that that was fine because, of course, I would have air-conditioning. At other times it manifest itself in statements of surprise; when I told people my brother was a welder, this was typically received with a rise of the eyebrows and the exclamation 'I didn't know manual jobs like that existed in your place!' While my life in Australasia was unquestionably better endowed with material comforts than the lives of most in the village, in their imagination my life abroad underwent additional layers of airbrushing, perhaps merging the conveniences of a wealthy country with the lifestyle of a Filipino elite.

This myth presents a problem, most distinctly, for migrants from Siquijor. Those who go abroad to places associated with material plenty (including North America, Europe, parts of the Middle East, Singapore and Hong Kong) carry with them certain expectations – their own

and the expectations others hold for them. The difficulties they encounter abroad can come as a shock. But from the point of view of those on Siquijor, these migrants are seen as the successful few that have ‘made it’. For the migrants to point out to those at home that their life abroad is difficult, as is the case for many migrants – that they have to do a lot of menial work, that they cannot afford to hire household help, that most of their weekly wage is spent on necessities and that the gifts they brought back to Siquijor were purchased via a loan – is to dismantle that image of success and the superordinate status it brings. Even worse, they risk being seen as ungrateful for the opportunity, as personally failing to materialise its benefits or, as McKay (2012, 92) describes elsewhere in the Philippines, as being unable to ‘cope up’ with their situation. Thus, ironically, those Siquijodnon best placed to expose the blemishes on the West’s image of material comfort and plenty have an interest in maintaining a myth that oppresses them as it brings them status.

Not only is *Amerika* idealised in terms of its affluence, but it is placed in polar opposition to the Philippines, which – in a common trope among my informants – becomes defined in terms of its poverty. *Amerika* was typically cited by my informants as the richest and most developed country in the world (although South Korea, ‘Saudi’^v and Singapore were also identified by some in interviews as the richest places in the world). The Philippines, meanwhile, was positioned at the very bottom as one of the poorest and least developed, countries. Indeed, in only one of over twenty interviews in which this specific issue was addressed was the Philippines *not* mentioned among the poorest. This is interesting when we consider that, at the time, the World Bank ranked the Philippines as a middle income country in its World Development Indicators (WDI) (and still does). This is according to a classification where the groups are low, middle and high income and where 54 countries qualified as low income^{vi} (The World Bank 2006, 278). Although this ranking should not necessarily be treated as an indication of living standards, what it tells us is that my Siquijodnon friends and acquaintances are considerably more severe in judging their country’s economic status as it compares to the rest of the world than is justified. In the Siquijodnon imagination, the world, it would seem, has come to be conceived of in almost dichotomous terms where the rich and developed *Amerika* is counterpoint to the poor undeveloped Philippines.

This opposition is not only about the West having more of value, but of things Western being more valued. For example, as I describe elsewhere (Bulloch 2009; 2011), solid

concrete houses with metal roofs have come to be prized over native bamboo and *nipa* houses. While concrete houses are more secure and are low maintenance compared to a bamboo and *nipa* house, which requires constant small repairs, they can also act like an oven in the tropical climate, as the metal roof magnifies the heat and the solid walls stifle air movement. This is particularly so when rooms are small and without ceilings, as is often the case on Siquijor. Reflecting an ambivalence towards aspects of their traditional lifestyle, while people would praise the practical value of bamboo houses in conversation, a solid concrete house is one of the main items families will spend money on if they acquire sufficient funds. While there are numerous factors at work here, I suggest this is in part because concrete houses have come to be associated with a Western-inspired modernity – it is what people see in images of the West, where cold weather necessitates solid housing materials (as well as in television programs set in wealthy Manila suburbs where the luxuries of air-conditioning mitigate the climatic impracticalities and the outside world is something from which to be closed away).

As I describe elsewhere (Bulloch, 2009, 2011), a similar process is at work in relation to food, whereby imported, and particularly American, foods are often seen as better than local foods, which are derided as ‘the food of the poor’, even while people acknowledge the latter are very healthy. For example, in the home of one acquaintance, in an ornate glass-fronted cabinet, various imported foods sit prominently displayed and carefully arranged. These items include apricot jam, various types of coffee, exotic fruit juice and a number of canned meats (one stating, ‘From the farmlands of America’ on the packet). These sit adjacent to other cabinets and shelves displaying prized possession, such as ornaments and photographs. Local foods, meanwhile, are tucked away in closed cupboards. While objects which ‘resist our desire to possess them’ (Simmel 2011 [1978], 69) due to price and/or scarcity are often accorded higher value, there seems to be more at work here. Many things local have come to represent poverty. This is both product of, and fuel for, the almost binary poor/rich contrast many of my Siquijodnon informants maintain between the Philippines and *Amerika*.

This devaluation was applied as well, to Filipino bodies (also see David and Okazaki 2006b, 9). During my time on Siquijor, it was not uncommon to hear people negatively contrasting ‘typical’ Filipino physical features to those of *Amerikanos*. ‘European’ form – what my informants described as ‘white’ skin, ‘long’ noses, ‘heart-shaped’ faces, and ‘slim’ (curvy) bodies – were prized over more quintessentially Malay characteristics of ‘*morena*’

skin, 'flat' noses, 'square' faces and 'skinny' bodies (see below). People often compared their appearance unfavourably to my own. Visiting my friend Virgie one day, I noticed she seemed rather dejected. When I asked her what was wrong, she told me that she was ugly. 'My nose is flat,' she complained, 'I wish I could have a long nose like you. And my skin is black.' 'Why don't you like dark skin?' I asked. 'It's untidy, white skin is better because it's *limpyo* (clean).'

^{vii} Demand for skin bleaching products in the Philippines is huge: the monumental department stores of Manila to the small general stores of Siquijor stock an abundance of skin whitening creams and soaps. Cartons of Nestlé UHT milk, commonly found in the general stores on Siquijor and packed specifically for the Philippine market, promote themselves by indirectly alluding to a connection between white milk and white skin: 'For Skin That's 'A' Okay' the packet declares below a photo of an exceptionally fair Caucasian woman and child.^{viii}

A preference for fair skin in the Philippines has both class and colonial origins. As in much of the world, including Europe prior to the twentieth century, fair skin has acquired desirability through its association with the wealthy classes who do not need to labour under the sun. But ideals of beauty in the Philippines are not reducible to local class associations. Princess Orig (2002) traces values applied to skin colour in the Philippines, mostly as reflected in literature, from pre-colonial times to the late 1990s. Interestingly, she finds that darker skin was, at least in certain circles, prized at the close of the Spanish era, representing national pride and a rejection of colonial ideals. 'Unfortunately', she laments, under American rule 'it took only a matter of decades for the Filipinos to revert to a white aesthetics' (Orig 2002, 101). Orig relates this directly to the role that Americans played in the 'the Filipino psyche', including American stage and film actors as 'the new deities of modern life' (Orig, 2002, p. 101).

However, in other respects typically Caucasian features do not coincide with current Filipino ideals of beauty. For example, long utterly straight glossy hair – in other words, quintessentially Malay hair – is highly prized. Joanne Rondilla (2009) suggests that this constitutes part of a relatively recent shift in conceptions of beauty in the Philippines. It is now less European features women in the Philippines strive for, she contends, but *mestizo* features, particularly influenced by the Chinese *mestizo*^{ix} ruling class. Indeed, today, while *mestizos* make up only a small percentage of the total population, they dominate media images. However, Rondilla further suggests that while 'this shift in Asian beauty seems to

acknowledge elements of Filipino beauty' (Rondilla 2009, 79), the beauty industry in Asia is in fact dominated by a 'racially ambiguous' (Rondilla 2009, 80) ideal that remains underpinned by Eurocentric standards (a point I return to below). Although my own ethnographic work has focused only on Siquijor, it is clear that these values, characterised in the Philippines as part of a 'colonial mentality', extend well beyond Siquijor and probably exist throughout much of the Christian lowlands. Indeed, Filipino-American psychologist, E.J.R David (2011, 13) makes similar observations for the Philippines in general:

Among Filipinos in the Philippines, the legacies of Spanish and American colonialism continue to propagate the message that anything Filipino is inferior to anything American or Western. Indeed, the 'beautiful' people are mostly light-skinned or someone who has European ancestry. Skin whitening products and clinics are abundant. English is the language used in schools, government, business, and science. Pretty much anything that is imported or 'Made in the U.S.A.' is automatically regarded as of better quality than anything made locally. Thus, the over 92 million Filipinos in the Philippines are barraged by Western and American cultural influences on a daily basis, messages that inferiorize the Filipino culture and ethnicity, and lead to many Filipinos wanting to become as Americanized or Westernized as possible. Therefore, it is not surprising that many Filipinos in the Philippines desire to immigrate to the United States to further their level of American-ness, and many of them do so.

Difference, Desire and Hierarchy

A diverse range of scholars – from Frantz Fanon (1963) to Arturo Escobar (1995) and Marshall Sahlins (2005 [1993]), for example – share a common argument considering the sense of comparative deficiency and the desire for some degree of emulation colonised populations may feel in relation to their colonisers, or so-called undeveloped populations may feel in relation to their developed counterpart. That is, such a sense of deficiency is not original, but must be generated. Sahlins argues that, in the colonial situation, 'the first commercial impulse of the local people is not to become just like us, but more like themselves' (Sahlins 2005 [1993], 23). When Pacific people gained Western goods, he argues, they inserted them into the local gift economy, using them to enrich interpersonal relations and their own indigenous ideas of the good life. Only over time did people increasingly gain a desire for the lives of the dominant other and hence come to pursue 'abstract wealth' for its own sake. He suggests the generation of 'a global inferiority complex' propels this transition (Sahlins 2005 [1993], 38).

Sahlins implicitly draws on postcolonial authors such as Frantz Fanon (1963), Albert Memmi (1965) and Paulo Freire (1970) in considering the psychological effects of colonialism. Fanon, for example, maintains that through colonial domination '[e]very effort is made to bring the colonized person to admit the inferiority of his culture..., to recognize the unreality of his 'nation', and, in the last extreme, the confused and imperfect character of his own biological structure' (Fanon 1963, 236). It is not my object here to provide an account of the origins or development of a colonial mentality in the Philippines through four centuries of Spanish and American colonial rule (a mammoth task, beyond the scope of this paper). Works touching on various aspects of the development of a colonial mentality include Renato Constantino (1982 [1966]), EJR David (2011), David and Sumie Okazaki (2006b), Niels Mulder (1990; 1996; 2000), Stanley Karnow (1989), Vicente Rafael (1988; 2000; 2005) and Nilda Rimonte (1997). Needless to say, a myriad of belittling discourses were deployed by both the Spanish and American regimes, many drawing on narratives of civilisation and progress to suggest that the colonial powers were uplifting a savage or childlike population (Bulloch 2009).

What I do wish to consider is some of the reasons that such inferiorising discourses are sustained (and, I argue, actively reproduced) in the current context. One such reason, I suggest, is that the meta-narratives of civilisation and progress, which construct certain populations as deficient and less advanced, have never really left us. They live on in ubiquitous notions of 'development', which took centre stage after World War II (for example, see Crush 1995; Escobar 1995; Rahnema and Bawtree 1997; Sachs 1992). Indeed, on Siquijor, no less than ten words in imported and native vernaculars signal the idea of development (Bulloch 2009). The internationally dominant development paradigm is still premised on the assumption that societies progress, in unilinear fashion – from tradition to modernity, simplicity to complexity, poverty to wealth – as a natural, inevitable and positive, process. It is premised, too, on an ideal of Western lifestyles as a universal and ultimate goal. Postdevelopment scholars argue that such Western development discourse is integral to shaping its objects' identities. Esteva, for example, informs us that for the majority of the world's peoples, the positive connotations of betterment and advance associated with the word 'development' serve as 'a reminder of *what they are not*. It is a reminder of an undesirable, undignified condition. To escape from it, they need to be enslaved to others' experiences and dreams' (Esteva 1992, 10, emphasis in original). Nanda Shrestha (1993, 8) argues that even in a country that was never colonised as such – Nepal – discourses of

development produced ‘a distinct colonial mindset [which] became deeply entrenched in the minds of the elites, moulding their cultural values, thinking, behavior and actions’. Through a personal narrative of his upbringing in Nepal, Shrestha shows how he came to the dejecting realisation that he belonged to the category ‘underdeveloped’ – how discourses of development taught him and his peers to reject their traditional knowledge, feel ashamed of their parent’s manual vocations, and aspire to the ‘modern’ life Westerners seemed to enjoy.

As the above discussion of ideals of beauty intimates, another key factor in reproducing certain inferiorising discourses is marketing. Indeed, the demand for skin whitening products described above does not simply reflect desire – it is an echo of the generation of desire through advertising. Marketing is often designed to make people feel deficient or inadequate (Lasch 1978 cited in Pollay 1986, 26; Williamson 1978, 8). It is this sense of inadequacy that will then induce us to buy products to compensate. Advertising does this most efficiently perhaps by reflecting and magnifying already existing desires and insecurities. Film, TV programs and magazine pieces go hand and hand with this, presenting airbrushed images of glamorous lifestyles and bodies that conform to and reproduce particular kinds of ideals. Rondilla’s (2009, 80) comment above about the beauty industry in Asia now promoting a ‘racially ambiguous’ ideal, gives the sense that a compromise between producing a desire for difference and a need for identification is being reached. As such, the beauty industry is operating not by making us want to be someone else as such, but to be a different (fairer, slimmer) version of ourselves.

Indeed, I suggest that in fully understanding these inferiorising discourses among Siquijodnon, it is crucial to appreciate the fact that Siquijodnon are not looking to *be Amerikano*, but rather, that they aspire (as many of us do) to be slightly different versions of themselves. Discourses that idealise a white other are most effective on Siquijor because they are activated in the *local* hierarchy as measures of difference between neighbours and kin. Symbols discussed above such as fair skin and owning goods ‘made in the USA’, are deployed as markers of status on a daily basis on Siquijor, as people strive for upward social mobility. For example, the aforementioned imported (mostly American) food items in the ornate glass cabinet are not just valued privately by their owners, they are put on display as items of prestige for others to see and covet. They reference not just wealth, but connections to *Amerika*, as the particular items are not locally available so must have been sent by an overseas contact. In another example, speaking English can be similarly deployed as a show

of status in the local community as well as ‘an acknowledgement of the social status of others’, as Dumont (1991, 81) notes following his fieldwork on Siquijor in 1980:

If a member of the local elite could routinely address his employee or his *barangay* clients in a Cebuano which was, for the occasion, purified of any English, and if the same person would also speak fluent English within his or her *barkada* [peer group], it is clear beyond any doubt that it was meant to recognize as well as to manipulate the speaker’s and hearer’s relative status. One could therefore pretend to initiate a symbolic social ascent by addressing someone better educated in English rather than Cebuano. But the same individual could thereby run the risk of being put down.

Thus the salient power of the self/other discourse comes from its reiteration in a myriad of small but tangible ways in people’s everyday lives. In this context, a mutually reinforcing dialectic between symbol and hierarchy is maintained. When my Siquijodnon informants telescope their local hierarchy to a global level, *Amerikanos* are positioned as *superordinate* to Filipinos in general and especially to the (poor, rural) kind of Filipino that they understand themselves as being. This is in part because *Amerikanos* embody many of those symbols of prestige which have salience in the local hierarchy; those symbols, of course, have gained salience because they were associated with groups (Europeans and Americans) historically held up as hierarchically pre-eminent. In other words, because symbols of Western modernity have become implicated in all levels of the local social hierarchy, the pre-eminence of *Amerikanos* in that hierarchy is resistant to change.

Significantly, subordination in this local hierarchy is *felt* through the pervasive Visayan emotion of *ulaw*, often glossed as shame.^x *Ulaw* can also denote embarrassment or even shyness. It can be a negative emotion, suggesting the feeling of being ashamed; but it can also suggest appropriate humbleness or modesty. To suggest that someone has *walay ulaw* – that they have no shame – is usually to suggest they have acted inappropriately. *Ulaw* is the dominant emotion people typically experience (or are expected to experience) on Siquijor in the presence of social superordinates (defined by factors such as relative wealth, formal education, vocation and family connections). It is performed principally through deference – letting a wealthy well-educated peer speak first and eat first, giving them a preferential seat and so forth – and through avoidance. As such, *ulaw* is a response to, and an assembler of, hierarchy.

For example, in contrast to many parts of the world where people are eager to practise their English skills when they meet a native English speaker, even college-educated young

Siquijodnon will often shy away from speaking, declaring that they feel ashamed. When young people spoke to me in English for the first time, sometimes their peers would tease them that they would get a ‘nose bleed’ – that is, they will make a fool of themselves, as what will emanate from their face upon their attempt to speak will be a mess rather than ‘proper’ English. In this way, their peers were ‘putting them in their place’ by reminding them of their relative ‘deficiencies’ and provoking *ulaw*. As this example suggests, the emotional structuring of the hierarchy through *ulaw* works, as much (if not more), from the bottom up as from the top down. Indeed, for the most part, feelings of *ulaw* are instilled through child socialisation – I have rarely seen higher status people speaking derogatorily toward lower status people in a way overtly intended to instil or provoke shame, but children who approach a higher status person boldly will often be chastised and told to have shame.

While superordinancy is synonymous with status in the local context, it does not necessarily incorporate honour or esteem.^{xi} To defer to someone, for example, is not quite the same as to respect them. Significantly, though, the emotion of *ulaw*, in the context of hierarchy, does incorporate a sense of abashment. Hierarchy, in this way, is emotionally felt, not just intellectually understood. It is, in large part, this abashment involved in *ulaw* that brings my informants to say that they are ‘just a Filipino’. They are not necessarily saying that that are ‘lesser’ than an *Amerikano*; they are indicating that they feel (hierarchically) lower than an *Amerikano*. (I will return to the idea of what it would mean to be ‘lesser’, below.)

Morals of Self and Other

Siquijodnon do not wholeheartedly idealise or hold superior *Amerikanos* or *Amerikano* lifestyles. While *Amerika* is associated with material plenty, and while consumer goods are sought and deployed in the local context as markers of status, Siquijodnon also maintain a strong discourse on ‘simple living’, that is, living expunged of superfluous consumerism and orientated towards relationships with kin (see Bulloch 2011). Indeed, when I systematically asked residents about their ideal lifestyle most spoke of *ang simpul nga kinabuhi*, the simple life. *Simpul* is synonymous with good on Siquijor, but also connotes sufficient and no more beyond. A good life is one that is not difficult, nor is it a life that is complicated by wealth. This notion of the good life does not valorise poverty, but it does favour austerity over consumer culture, attention to social relationships over attention to making money. At its most basic level, *ang simpul nga kinabuhi* entails having three meals a day, being able to

send one's children to school and to access healthcare. On Siquijor it is often used to reference a bucolic ideal – having a few backyard animals and a garden, collecting food from the local environment, living in a *nipa* hut or otherwise modest house. It also suggests an embeddedness in local social relations and harmony in social relationships. On Siquijor, reciprocity is central to this as the means for reproducing social ties. Earning a decent amount of money can contribute to the simple life, which, as noted, connotes *not* poverty but sufficiency. And money and other material resources can contribute to the social relationships that the idea of the simple life prioritises.

Indeed, it is the value Siquijodnon attribute to relationships with others, (re)produced through reciprocity, that allows for a salient *critique* of *Amerikanos*. As noted at the start of this paper, a discourse of self-deprecation in relation to *Amerikanos* is not totalising – it competes with a range of alternative discourses and is thus always partial and contingent.^{xii} While many Siquijodnon covet *Amerikan* lifestyles, they are at once critical of *Amerikan* lifestyles and values in a range of ways. This includes such perceptions as: *Amerikanos* are somewhat sexually debauched; they are rude and insensitive to the feelings of others; and they are slightly inept at manual labour (Bulloch 2009; Bulloch and Fabinyi 2009).

Perhaps most prominent among the criticisms is that *Amerikanos* are overly individualistic in contrast to an upright Filipino embeddedness in social relations, particularly kin relations. People I met on Siquijor often assumed that *Amerikanos* do not value family in anything like the way that Filipinos do and like to be extremely independent. I was informed by an acquaintance on Siquijor that 'here in the Philippines we care about our families' – not directly in response to any comment or action of my own, but in explaining her own actions with the assumption that such a trait would naturally be foreign to me. I was asked if it is true that, in *Amerika*, all children *have* to leave the parental home at the age of 18. During initial stays among two separate host families, it was months before they invited me to join them for meals and other activities. They later told me that they had done this in an attempt to make me more comfortable because they were under the understanding that *Amerikanos* prefer to be alone. Meanwhile, members of another family with which I was acquainted were offended when an *Amerikano*, who had stayed at their house in the past, later visited without bringing them a present. *Amerikanos*, they speculated, have '*walay utang kabubut-on*', no sense of gratitude (literally, debt). In this respect, my Siquijodnon friends and acquaintances position themselves as quite distinctly superior to *Amerikanos* and in a very particular kind of a way:

they understand themselves as maintaining a ‘proper’ sense of connection and obligation to one another.

However, Siquijodnon understand their differences from *Amerikanos* in terms of their own moral failings as well. I mentioned above that Siquijodnon do not tend to construct themselves as inherently ‘lesser’ than *Amerikanos*. They do not suggest that they are less intelligent or less capable than others. Rather, they emphasise moral failings.^{xiii} For example, when I asked a number of informants why the Philippines had not further progressed, I was met with a particular kind of self-blame. It is ‘each one of us’, it is ‘the attitude of the *Pinoy* [Filipino]’, I was told. ‘Filipinos are weak compared to the Americans,’ Carmen claimed, while Rose explained that in many other parts of the world ‘people are united in making their place progress’.^{xiv} The most commonly cited reasons among my informants for the ‘failure’ of the Philippines to attain the levels of wealth in many other countries was corruption and ‘crab mentality’ (see below), while a lack of cooperation and laziness were also repeatedly noted.

Corruption is understood by my informants to be rife in the Philippines, from the upper echelons of government to local community projects. Conversely, on Siquijor wealthy countries are understood to be governed in terms of moral restraint; people work together in an ordered and transparent fashion for public betterment rather than private gain. The concept of ‘crab mentality’, meanwhile, is used negatively on Siquijor to denote a reputed Filipino cultural tendency to want all people to be ‘at the same level’ and therefore to try to ‘pull down’ those who succeed, or to attempt to partake of their success and thereby dilute it. It refers to an analogy of crabs in a bucket, whereby if one attempts to climb out, others will pull it back down in their own attempts to clamber out. Peter Wilson (1995[1973]) describes a very similar metaphor, known as ‘crab antics’, in the Caribbean, in a context where ‘[p]eople of equal or unequal status take whatever opportunity they can to pull another down or to keep him in his place’ (Wilson 1995 [1973], 115). On Siquijor, the concept is often used specifically in reference to ideas of progress. Again, people suggested to me that in ‘your place’ everyone has an opportunity to ‘get ahead’, implying that others do not attempt to ‘pull them down’ or (to use an idiom from my culture) to ‘ride on their coat-tails’.

These moral criticisms of self need to be considered in light of the preceding discussion. The pattern which emerges is that, while on the level of family and immediate community Siquijodnon often understand themselves as being morally superior to *Amerikanos*, this

becomes reversed as the unit of analysis broadens into the public realm. The prevailing discourse on Siquijor maintains that Filipinos look after one another, while *Amerikanos* are individualistic; on the other hand, *Amerikanos* pursue gain in ways that benefit the nation as a whole, while Filipinos drain resources for themselves and their own, which should be used to advance the nation. Thus, there is ambivalence towards the moral status of individualism, self-reliance and depersonalised relations. In the discourse on the value of reciprocity, the Filipino is portrayed as selflessly working for family and friends, but this becomes selfishly working *only* for family and friends according to the corruption discourse. In the reciprocity discourse, the *Amerikano* is selfishly pursuing individual wealth, but this becomes a heroic driving forward the nation (left unfettered to do so by self-reliant others), according to the critique of crab-mentality. While personalised cooperation is valourised on the level of family and immediate community, depersonalised cooperation is valourised in relation to the public level. The crab mentality discourse highlights the actual inseparability of the private and public realms because here norms of personal obligation or self-reliance are seen as inherently implicated in community-wide development.^{xv}

Ambivalent though their discourse on the relative moral status of Filipinos versus *Amerikanos* may be, it leaves no room for any suggestion that poverty in the Philippines is the fault of anyone other than Filipinos. For example, when I asked a better-off senior woman in the village if she felt that the problems in the Philippines had internal or external causes she chided me:

The problem is with our country alone. Why? Are you blaming other countries and what-have-you that we are the only [trails off]? It's our individual attitude. We Filipinos are kind of lazy – not all Filipinos because I am also Filipino. If you're lazy, how can you improve yourself? You'll never progress.

This self-blame of Filipinos as a collectivity (maintained even while she distances herself from it) rests on two key assumptions on Siquijor. The first is that poverty is an original state and the second is that development is brought about through factors endogenous to the society (principally involving cultural change). These are assumptions characteristic of modernisation theories and neoliberalism and contrast, for example, with dependency and world systems theories, which emerged out of Latin America in the 1960s. The latter maintain that countries at the 'core' of the world system are enriched at the expense of those at the 'periphery'. Massive foreign debts and associated structural adjustment policies (SAPs) in the Philippines provide an obvious example. In 2012, the Philippines owed over US\$60

billion in foreign debt (Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas 2013). A large debt burden was initially established when foreign creditors, including the US-dominated World Bank, lent substantial sums to Ferdinand Marcos – a corrupt dictator who was known at the time to be squandering the funds (Bello et al. 1982). When the country's ability to service these debts became compromised during the debt crisis of the early 1980s, in order to maintain good standing with external creditors the Philippines was forced to adopt IMF structural adjustment policies. These included reducing spending on health and education, cutting subsidies to farmers, privatising state assets, dismantling trade barriers and promoting an export-orientated economy (Parreñas 2006, 15-18). Export competition with other debtor countries produced a 'race to the bottom' for prices of raw products and a dependence on a volatile international economy. Transnational corporations benefited at the expense of poor farmers in the Philippines. Debt servicing burdens resulted in ever-increasingly loans and funds diverted from basic services for the Filipino people. Thus, through arguably odious initial debts, the Philippines became tethered to the dictates of foreign powers. My purpose here is not to argue for (or, indeed, against) the premise that outside forces made the Philippines poor, but rather to point out that inequality can be understood and explained in a range of ways with varying degrees of emphasis on internal and external factors.

In accord with liberal discourses of self-responsibility, my Siquijodnon informants assume that problems in their society stem from their own debased or misguided habits and could have (and should have) been solved internally. Outside culpability is not part of the equation. The US is positioned as a benefactor, with no suggestion among all but one of my informants, of colonial or post-colonial exploitation. Indeed, some even lamented that the Philippines had ever gained independence, imagining it would be on the same economic standing with the United States today had it remained a colony. This resonates with a discussion, in relation to the Philippines more broadly, by Nilda Rimonte (1997, 59), who asserts that a distorted view of Philippine history:

endorses the essentialist myths that their problems are entirely due to who they are: that history has little to do with them and the problems they confront; that the only way for them to solve their problems is to change themselves; that if they have not changed themselves yet, it is because they are too feckless or too sinful, having strayed from the prescribed Catholic path of righteousness.

If Siquijodnon could, in part, blame the US for their subordinate position, some of the *ulaw*, the shame, of being subordinate might be tempered, perhaps even redirected as

something that should properly be felt by *Amerikanos* (*ulaw* being an emotion that should be felt by one who owes something to another). Instead, their shame is intensified by the sense that development was *always attainable* through their own exertions, but that due to a lack of moral discipline they failed to materialise its benefits, seemingly so easily realised by others.

Conclusion

The idealisation of things *Amerikan* on Siquijor is reproduced so powerfully in the post-colonial situation in large part because of the place of those things in the local hierarchy, as markers of prestige, differentiating neighbours and kin. This is fed by capitalist forces. Where the self can be held up to an ideal and found lacking, desire fills the space in between. This translates to a certain type of consumer demand: demand for skin whitening products and concrete houses, vacations abroad and foreign foods. Dissatisfaction with the self is fodder for someone else's commercial gain. Marketing easily insinuates itself into already existing insecurities and desires, magnifying them. Like the mestizo form, ubiquitous in the media, that at once references the European other and the Asian self, ideals need to be seemingly attainable, yet always just out of reach. Siquijodnon are suspicious of the pursuit of consumer lifestyles, and this is voiced in their frequent invocations of the simple life, but they are caught between contending ideals that each exert a pull on them.

The demand created is at once contained. Siquijodnon have a sense of desire *without* a sense of entitlement. They see material progress as something that they should be able to achieve on their own – not something that someone else should share with them, and not something they have been robbed of. One of the effects of this self-blame for 'failure' to develop is that it detracts attention from the structural nature of global economic inequality. Poverty becomes a local problem, belonging properly in the so-called Third World. This is convenient for an international and national development apparatus that has vested interests in not challenging global structural inequalities (because that would mean significant wealth redistribution), or is simply not in a position to (such as smaller NGOs), and therefore sets its sights on reforming individual communities from within. Whether by accident or design (in the aggregate), the poor blaming themselves for their own relative poverty keeps potential challenges to the status quo conveniently at bay.

The idealisation of *Amerika* and denigration of self in much of the Christian Philippines is as striking as it is uncomfortable. But, as with any form of racism, this kind of auto-racism deserves serious academic scrutiny in order to better understand its origins, patterns, limits

and effects. History, psychology and ethnography each have special places in this study, and more attention is merited towards auto-racism in the Philippines from each. Ethnography, however, is most critically lacking and further studies hold the potential to open a valuable dialogue. Ethnography in various parts of the Philippines could serve as the basis for comparison between Christian and non-Christian areas,^{xvi} rural and urban settlements, communities that are highly stratified and those that are relatively equal, for example. It would also contribute to a global ethnographic literature on auto-racism, advancing understandings of why auto-racism predominates in some post-colonial contexts and not in others.

Notes

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ⁱⁱ This three-year project, entitled 'Intimate relationships and the politics of personhood in the Philippines', is funded by an Australian Research Council Discovery Early Career Research Award.

ⁱⁱⁱ In Cebuano, words are made plural by the insertion of '*mga*' before the noun. However, where I use Cebuano words in the context of English sentences in this paper, for clarity I add 's' to the ends of these words to indicate plurals. Cebuano also contains irregular plurals that do not require the addition of a plural marker, as does English (such as, a fish/ many fish). The noun 'Siquijodnon' can suggest either plural or singular, depending on the context, and therefore I do not pluralise this term.

^{iv} E.J.R. David (2011: 10) relatedly comments of his upbringing in the Philippines and the US: 'In my mind at that time, Americans equalled White'.

^v The term 'Saudi' was used by my informants to encompass the Middle East.

^{vi} The classifications are based on Gross National Income per capita as follows: low-income, \$875 or less in 2005; middle-income, \$876 to \$10,725; and high-income, \$10,726 and above (The World Bank 2006: 285).

^{vii} Focusing on the island of Bohol, Borchgrevink (2002) shows that cleanliness is a key organising concept among Visayans. Meanwhile, according to Anderson (2006) there was a perception among the American colonial administration in the Philippines that darker 'races' were less hygienic than 'whites'. Anderson shows that a concern with cleanliness was a key feature of colonial rule in the villages.

^{viii} The stated connection on the packet between beautiful skin and milk is that milk contains vitamin A, which promotes healthy skin. However, while in the Philippines I have also heard people suggest that milk can help to make your skin white, and I doubt this was lost on the designers of the Nestlé milk packet.

^{ix} The term *mestizo* denotes mixed descent. In the Philippines it originally connoted indigenous Filipino and Spanish ancestry, but is now used more broadly.

^x *Ulaw* is the Visayan equivalent of what in Tagalog is called *hiya* (Lynch 2004 [1984], 42). As Rafael (1988: 126) points out, *hiya* 'can take on a wide variety of significations'. It is the feeling of 'irritation or vexation at being made an object of amusement or a foil for someone else's aggrandizement...' as well as 'the dominant affect that arises from the failure to return what one has received' (Rafael 1988: 126). In this latter respect, the 'displeasure produced by the feeling of *hiya* therefore comes from being made to think of all the things one

would like to give back in return but cannot, as well as all the things one would like to receive but can no longer ask for' (Rafael 1988: 126). *Hiya*, like *ulaw*, 'also has a positive sense... to render respect, to consider and honor someone' (Rafael 1988: 126).

^{xi} In a study of everyday politics in a Central Luzon village, Benedict Kerkvliet (Kerkvliet 2002 [1990]: 60-2) points out that Weber's definition of status as incorporating honour, prestige and esteem is not appropriate for the ethnographic context where the 'rich-poor stratification' is the central component of status. While on Siquijor, where the rich-poor stratification is similarly central, status is normally accompanied by prestige, but not necessarily by honour or esteem.

^{xii} Similarly, Ira Baskow argues among the Orokavia of Papua New Guinea, views of 'whitemen' are 'complex and ambivalent' (Baskow 2006: 3) involving both criticism and admiration.

^{xiii} Stephen Leavitt (2005) draws on a comparison between humiliation and shame to make a similar point with regards to the Bumbita of Papua New Guinea.

^{xiv} Deirdre McKay (2012: 16) similarly observes that villagers in Ifugao, in the northern Philippines, 'share a popular discourse that blames 'poor Filipino values' for political strife and underdevelopment.'

^{xv} This ambivalence between somewhat contending concepts of 'moral economy' (Scott 1977) is drawn out in greater depth in a work-in-progress paper tentatively entitled 'Development In-tension: Values of Social and Economic Organisation in Notions of Development on Siquijor Island, Philippines'.

^{xvi} Sahlins (2005 [1993]: 39) suggests, 'In addition to the coercion and destruction unleashed by global capitalism, we should not underestimate the complementary means of cultural debasement such as the propagation of Christianity'. Joel Robbins (2005) picks up on Sahlins's comment. He argues that 'among groups who have been deeply influenced by the colonial process but have remained physically peripheral to it, those who have engaged Christianity seriously are the ones most likely to abandon their efforts at cultural reproduction and to take on ideas of development as their own' (Robbins 2005: 45). A study on this would be germane in the Philippine context, particularly through comparison with non-Christian groups in the archipelago.

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