



Mimic Me: Mimicry, Colonialism, and Christianity

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Abstract

This paper attempts to define mimicry based on Homi Bhabha's definition in the context of colonial and postcolonial Philippines. It seeks to point out the lingering colonial mentality of the former colonized people in the present age in the area of speaking English, perceiving that everything from the West is the best, and desiring whiteness. It ends with the challenge to mimic Christ more than anything else as the ultimate role-model.

Keywords: Homi Bhabha, mimicry, Filipinos, Philippines, colonial mentality.

Introduction

Bishop Domingo de Salazar watched with admiration the skill of the Chinese in Manila in reproducing carved images from Spain. He proudly reported to the King of Spain,

I think nothing more perfect could be produced than some of their marble statues of the child Jesus which I have seen...The churches are beginning to be furnished with the images which the Sangleys make...reproducing the images that come from España. I believe that soon we shall not even miss those made in Flanders.¹

The word mimic derives from the Greek word *μίμος mimos* which means to copy, to follow, or to imitate. Mimic is not confined in sounds, behavior, or persons. To mimic includes objects, ideas, and arts.² The Chinese living in Spanish Period Philippines were often stereotyped as traders who came with their goods in their junk ships. However, the Chinese were also "craftsmen, storekeepers, unskilled laborers, and mostly farmers, fishermen, and domestic servants" that the

¹ The Spanish called the Chinese *Sangley* which means "one who often comes." Ambeth R. Ocampo, "Salazar's 1590 report on the Manila Chinese," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, February 6, 2019, accessed on July 11, 2019, <https://opinion.inquirer.net/119368/salazars-1590-report-on-the-manila-chinese>. Juliet Lee Uytanlet, *The Hybrid Tsinoys: Challenges of Hybridity and Homogeneity as Socio-Cultural Constructs among the Chinese in the Philippines* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2016), 37.

² Mimic means to copy, imitate, mimic, or mock. It means "to make something so that it resembles an existing thing." Merriam Webster, "Mimic," accessed on July 11, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mimic>.



Spaniards relied on.³ The craftsmen helped produce the images and crosses that resembled those in Spain and in the rest of Europe. The Chinese were very good in repeating that Bishop Salazar was very pleased with their work. The Pre-Hispanic Filipinos used light materials like bamboo, rattan, and palm to build huts as homes. Earlier in the colonization era, the churches were also likewise built with such materials but eventually they built Baroque churches made of stone.

The Spanish friars, used to large, lofty, strong stone churches built to last for a thousand years, did not regard these impermanent structures as proper dwellings for God. They introduced the Western concept of permanence in architecture to the Philippines, and also the use of stone for building.⁴

The Spanish friars wanted the ecclesiastic structure in the Philippines to mimic that of Spain. They sought skilled Filipino and Chinese craftsmen who could copy the European design based on the friars' blurry memory.⁵ Mimicry in this case is to copy and reproduce something that is exactly the same of the original or somewhat identical. To mimic can connote mechanical copying such as parrots or mockingbirds mimicking the sounds around them without necessarily understanding what those words or sounds mean. Parrots are often perceived as mindlessly copying words of humans so that "parroting" is defined as repeating words ad verbatim without understanding the meaning.⁶ But do they mindlessly just repeat words? Parrots can repeat words endlessly and mockingbirds can copy sounds easily as well.

Irene Pepperidge proved that birds have intelligence and can learn language. Pepperidge's experiment on a grey parrot named Alex shows that even small animals can have the capacity of some level of reason and understanding.⁷ It is possible then that parrots and mockingbirds could actually mimic mindfully with purpose though they may not necessarily know the meaning of the words or sounds. When pet parrots mimic words of their human owners, they display social skill and are possibly seeking an ally or mate. Likewise, when mockingbirds mimic sounds, they seek to attract possible mates. Mimicry for these birds is to copy words or sounds with a possible purpose in mind and not necessarily mindlessly.

Mimicking can be a strategy for either attack or survival. Lacan likens mimic or mimicry to camouflage.⁸ Insects like moths or butterflies camouflage themselves to survive while animals like alligators or geckos camouflage themselves to attack their prey. Soldiers are camouflaged to attack and to protect themselves at the same time. Mimicking can also imply intentional imitation for the purpose of satire or comedy. Children can be cruel or turn into bullies as they annoyingly

³ Lucille Chia, "The Butcher, the Baker, and the Carpenter: Chinese Sojourners in the Spanish Philippines and Their Impact on Southern Fujian (Sixteenth-Eighteenth Centuries)," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 4, (2006): 515.

⁴ Augusto Fabella Villalon, "Baroque Churches of the Philippines," *UNESCO Courier*, accessed on July 11, 2019, <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.asburyseminary.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f5h&AN=1439182&site=eds-live>.

⁵ "The friars were guided by their vague recollections of churches they had seen before leaving their native Spain, and built structures in a visually delightful, highly personalized Philippine style adapted from Spanish baroque." *Ibid.*, 44.

⁶ Matt Cameron, *Parrots: The Animal Answer Guide* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 70.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 71-72.

⁸ Yuanlong Ma, "Lacan on Gaze," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 5, No. 10 (1), (October 2015): 134.



repeat what a person says or even impersonate another to make fun of them. Celebrity impersonators mimic to earn a living, to entertain or to ridicule the persons imitated.⁹

Mimicry is the ability to make duplicates of objects both living and non-living things; to copy mechanically or mindfully with a purpose; to camouflage for survival or attack; to mimic in order to entertain or ridicule. For this paper, mimicry is defined in the context of colonialism and its effects to postcolonialism. Therefore, it is inevitable to return to colonialism and its painful past before we can proceed in defining it and discussing its effect on our present context.

Albert Memmi, a Tunisian Jew, paints portraits of the colonizer and the colonized in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. He describes the colonizer as a privileged European who lived in the colony at the expense of the colonized. His description of the colonizer concurrently gives a picture of the colonized.

He finds himself on one side of a scale, the other side which bears the colonized man. If he's living standards are high, it is because those of the colonized are low; if he can benefit from plentiful and undemanding labor and servants, it is because the colonized can be exploited at will and are not protected by the laws of the colony; if he can easily obtain administrative positions, it is because they are reserved for him and the colonized are excluded from them; the more freely he breathes, the more the colonized are choked.¹⁰

The colonizer is often imagined as a tall and tanned Westerner that is selflessly laboring for mankind if he was not engaged in war. The colonized, on the other hand, is pictured as dark and backward, lazy and not productive as a worker. This led to the colonizer's justification of a low wage for the colonized.¹¹ It is no wonder then that the colonized would dream of becoming like the colonizer, having all the success, riches, and power. In his attempt to become like the colonizer, he sought "to change his condition by changing his skin." Such admiration for the colonizer led the colonized to wish to become equal with the colonizer by resembling him "to the point of disappearing in him." There is this ambivalence of love-hate relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. In mimicry, anything the colonizer did or say, the colonized would readily accept and follow whether in "habits, clothing, food, architecture" even if not fitting to them.¹² The Filipinos can relate with Memmi's portraits of both the colonizer and the colonized since the Philippines was colonized by both Spain and the United States of America. The fact is that colonial mentality still lingers and seduces the Filipinos into continuous patronage and imitation of Western ideas, products, lifestyle, language, clothing, and physical features despite decolonization and democratization. Worse, Filipinos may mimic without much reflection or as Memmi says "even if inappropriate"¹³ Heightening of this desire for anything from the West can also be attributed to the present globalization and the digital age of social media.

It is imperative then for formerly colonized nations to return to their historical past and evaluate their present realities with honesty and deep reflection as they move forward in understanding their present identity as a nation with globalization and cultural hybridity. Likewise, Christians from former colonized nations need to revisit their mission history. They need to come to terms with the effects of colonialism and the spread of Christian faith with their present way of doing church

⁹ Mimicry is "the art of imitation, which is practiced the world over, from annoying siblings who repeat every word you say, to professional comedians who impersonate famous people onstage." Vocabulary, "Mimicry," accessed on July 10, 2019, <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/mimicry>.

¹⁰ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Beacon Press: Boston, 1991), 8.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3, 79–83.

¹² *Ibid.*, 119–121.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 121.



and mission. History is for us to learn the mistakes of the past and hopefully not to mimic them. Homi Bhabha defines mimicry in the context of colonial discourse.

[M]imicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.¹⁴

There are several characteristics we can deduce out of Bhabha's definition. First, mimicry is a product of desire constructed by the colonized for the colonizer. This desire could be to acquire the colonizer's approval and recognition that the colonized is human and of equal stature with that of the colonizer. It could be the desire for the position, fame, riches, goods, men and women of the colonizer. It could also be the desire to be like the colonizer in terms of physical characteristics like clothing or facial features. This driving desire for the colonized who is also the observer is to mimic even if it is as Bhabha would describe as a "partial" representation of the colonizer or the observed.¹⁵

Second, mimicry is never a perfect copy or duplicate. It is an imitation, an attempt to be similar and yet always lacking in the eyes of the colonizer. Interestingly, Bhabha describes how mimicry tends to be copying in excess and still remain in difference. He also describes mimicry as a sort of slippage, never achieving the standard or the original.¹⁶ Mimicry becomes a mockery and a ridicule instead of appreciation for its characteristics of sameness to the original.

Third, mimicry is ambivalence and in constant uncertainty. To be or not to be. I am or I am not. The colonized struggled within the opposing feelings he had for the colonizer, a love-hate feeling. The colonized was in a liminal state wherein his/her identity fell into the hands of the colonizers who maintained the difference and disapproval.¹⁷

The following is a critic and reflection on the impact and influence of colonial mentality and how mimicry is applied among the Filipinos in the Philippines.

Mimic Me

Bhabha's article "Of Mimicry and Man" mimics the title of the novel *Of Mice and Men*. His article and the novel may not necessarily talk about the same issues but the fact remains that Bhabha mimics the title. Is this mimicry a ridicule or simply an imitation? Knowing that Bhabha mastered literature, it is no wonder for him to mimic famous titles of novels. There are three areas of mimicry that this paper will focus on: the use of the English language, Westernization, and the popularity of white skin.

Speak English

Language is a powerful way to mimic the colonizers. On the other hand, language can serve as control and dominion. Vincent Rafael's article on the "War of Translation" presents how the English language became the medium of instruction in Philippine schools and eventually a

¹⁴ Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 28 (Spring, 1984): 126. See also, Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 121–131.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁷ "The ambivalence of colonial authority repeatedly turns from mimicry—a difference that is almost nothing but not quite—to menace—a difference that is almost total but not quite." *Ibid.*, 132.



language that the Filipinos would recognize as their own. Today, aside from Filipino language, English is one of the two official languages of the country. At the end of the 350 years rule of Spain in the Philippines, only 5 percent of the whole population claimed to be fluent in Spanish. The new colonizers then made English as “the dominant language of rule and education.”¹⁸

In an attempt to “pacify” Filipinos during the Philippine-American War (1899–1902), the United States established a network of public schools all over the archipelago. The military governor, General Arthur MacArthur, thought that the schools would have a counterinsurgent effect. They would serve as “adjuncts to military operations,” needed to “expedite the restoration of tranquility throughout the archipelago.” American soldiers were initially assigned to serve as teachers. They were shortly followed by an army of American civilian teachers known as the “Thomasites” (named after the USS Thomas, the army transport that brought them to the country) in 1901. By the 1920s, however, most American teachers had been replaced by Filipinos as part of a larger effort to Filipinize the colonial government enroute to granting the colony eventual independence.¹⁹

Rafael points out the contradictions of American Regime in their desire to “civilize” and educate the Filipinos. The American Regime taught the Filipinos English since they did not want to learn the local language or Spanish. They wanted to assimilate them as their colonized people, a colony of the United States of America but segregated from the mainland. The Filipinos were subjected to their laws but had very limited rights compared to the Americans. Just like its predecessors, the new colonizers were not so successful in educating and making the Filipinos learn their language with limited numbers of teachers and resources. Worse, the use of the English language led to the rise of another elite group aside from the Spanish-speaking elite, the English speaking-minority who “gained greater economic wealth and social influence.”²⁰ This is mimicry in slippage, mimicry in ambivalence.

At present, English remains an important language for education, trade, and policy making in the country. In 2018, the Philippines was ranked 14th among 88 countries and 2nd in Asia by Education First English Proficiency Index.²¹ Nevertheless, reports on the decline of English proficiency among Filipino students as compared to other Asian countries becomes alarming with global competitiveness for the Filipino people. Roda S. Jimenez argues that the Department of Education must promote the development and proficiency of both Filipino and English languages.

¹⁸ The Filipinos who were then called *indios* during the Spanish Period could have known the Spanish language but levels of fluency might vary based on their social class. Education during this time was focused on religion, taught by friars, Spanish as the medium, and primarily for the elite. Royal decrees for educating the colonized people were not fully implemented. Manila only had one public school and education for the masses was neglected. It is no wonder that only 5 percent would dare to claim fluency in Spanish by the end of the Spanish Period. Vincent L. Rafael, “The War of Translation: Colonial Education, American English, and Tagalog Slang in the Philippines,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 74, no. 2 (May) 2015: 283–302. See also Patricio N. Abinales and Donna J. Amoroso, *State and Society in the Philippines* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 92–95.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 284.

²⁰ “By the 1930s, they comprised an impressive 35 percent of the population, making the Philippines the most literate in any Western language in all of colonial Southeast Asia. However, for the majority who had some years of education, familiarity with English did not necessarily mean fluency, while many others with little or no schooling at all could neither speak nor write in the new language. Barely literate in English, the majority lived in largely vernacular worlds where English (and Spanish) circulated intermittently, emanating as the language of colonial institutions and elites.” *Ibid.*, 284–285.

²¹ Education First, “EF English Proficiency Index,” accessed on July 18, 2019, <https://www.ef.com/wwen/epi/regions/asia/philippines/>.



Perhaps, the Department of Education's lack of proper emphasis for English in the instruction of our learners is the main problem. Instead of allowing English to grow in conjunction with the teaching of Filipino, our national language, the resulting scenario was promoting Filipino in schools at the expense of English, when the ideal but also realizable scenario could be the mutual development of both English and Filipino as languages of instruction.²²

The Filipinos applaud those who speak fluent English and most especially with American accents. It was observed that urban upper-class Filipino parents prefer to speak with their children in English instead of in the vernacular language. When in conversation with an English-speaker, some Filipinos will cry "nose bleed," an expression which means that one thinks so hard to speak in English that his nose starts to bleed.²³ Rafael reminisced those days in the late sixties when teachers would fine students caught speaking their native language instead of English. The vernacular language was suppressed to encourage English speaking.²⁴ However, English remained a foreign language that was subjected to proper grammar, correct pronunciation, and American accents. When I was a Communication Arts student taking a course on broadcasting, we were asked to mimic television broadcasters delivering the news in perfect American English. The accent was very important. The Filipinos are conscious of how they pronounce the English words and are afraid to be laughed at or ridiculed for mispronunciation or for making grammatical error. The vernacular languages like Tagalog, Bisaya, Ilongo or mixed languages like Taglish (Tagalog and English) are really in operative in daily conversation. Mimicry is imitation or duplication but may never attain perfection. Mimicry is copying that can also lead to mockery or ridicule.

West is the Best

The Filipino mischievous expression "*gaya gaya, puto maya, paglaki buwaya*" means you are a copycat. *Gaya* means copying or imitating. *Puto maya* is a rice cake that is more like the *biko* with glutinous rice and not the regular *puto* that is made from rice dough.²⁵ *Paglaki buwaya* means you will grow up and become a crocodile. This expression means that in copying someone or something, you may copy it wrongly and end up something funny or horrible like a crocodile. For this reason, this expression is used to conjure ridicule or shame on the copycat.

Colonial mentality is the mindset that everything from the West is the best. It arises from the colonized internal inferior perspective of one's own culture or heritage and the perception that the colonizer's are superior. The Filipinos cannot deny the fact that they continue to be lured by this mindset as evidenced in their preference for American brands than local brands in grocery items, Hollywood movies, Netflix canned shows, music, clothing, and cosmetics. The fact that many American brand commodities are now readily available in supermarkets when they used to only be found in Duty Free or exclusive membership shopping center is evidence of our continuous patronage and popularity of American goods. The idea of using imported brands gives a sense of feeling *alta sociedad*. Sade Andrea Zabala challenges Filipinos to assess whether they have any of these "50 Possible Signs You May Have Colonial Mentality." The list comprises issues

²² Roda S. Jimenez, "The decline of English proficiency in the Philippines," *Punto*, August 18, 2018, accessed on July 18, 2019, <https://punto.com.ph/the-decline-of-english-proficiency-in-the-philippines/>.

²³ Don't Forget to Move, "11 Unique Things Filipinos Say to Foreigners," accessed on July 18, 2019, <https://www.dontforgettomove.com/11-unique-things-filipinos-say-to-foreigners/>.

²⁴ "It has instead remained irreducibly foreign, incapable of finding a proper home among Filipinos. The foreignness of English comes not only with its association with conquest but also through its very agents of transmission. Early on, American teachers taught the language but were eventually replaced by Filipinos for whom English was at best a second and often imperfectly spoken tongue." Rafael, "War of Translation," 287.

²⁵ Arnaldo, "Gaya-gaya, puto maya," *With One's Past*, January 26, 2013, accessed on July 18, 2019, <https://withonespast.wordpress.com/2013/01/26/gaya-gaya-puto-maya/>.



concerning preference for white skin, American entertainment, English language, and foreign partners. Some examples in the list:

- Being seriously worried about getting a tan. You avoid the sun.
- Not liking or consuming literally any Filipino media.
- When you think Filipino accent is *baduy* (not trendy) or lousy, but think any other accent (especially Western accents like French, American, British, Australian, Spanish, or Swedish) sounds nice or beautiful.
- Same goes if you criticize someone for not speaking/writing good English.
- Thinking Filipinos who date/marry non-Filipinos (especially Whites) are super lucky and have won the lottery.²⁶

One visible way to mimic is by resembling the colonizer's way of clothing. During the Spanish Period, the Philippine society was divided into six classes. Stéphanie Marie R. Coo employs Memmi's categories of colonizer and colonized in classifying these six classes of people. She places the *peninsulares*, *insulares*, and Spanish Mestizos as colonizers while the Chinese Mestizos, *indios*, and Chinese as colonized. However, it should be noted that this classification is more on racial or ethnic classification which eventually was replaced by the socio-cultural and economic classification by mid-19th century. This provided the colonized people some recognition as their status was viewed based on their education, associations, lifestyles, or wealth and no longer solely on race or color.²⁷

Coo's dissertation seeks "to reconstruct the clothing culture of 19th century Spanish Philippines and to discover the importance of dress in Philippine colonial society." She argues that "clothing is one of the things that predominate ordinary" particularly for people who put importance on their outward look. The native population were exposed to European tastes that led to their desire for Western products which include fashion sense. She discovers hybridity or fusion of clothing material and fashion creation among the Filipinos during this time period. There was blurriness of fashion among classes, meaning at times, the clothing itself cannot suggest the social class.²⁸

The brown-skinned among the colonized, in being aware that they could not alter their physical features and skin color, have learned to manipulate their outward appearances in order to establish their status in Philippine colonial society. An unspoken assumption was that a dress, when worn by a fair-skinned *española* or mestiza, would be enhanced while the same dress on a brown-skinned *india* would be, in a way, diminished. Certainly, there were exceptions, which proves that the matter was more complex. An *india* who was beautiful, well-connected and wealthy and who also embodied the Spanish qualities of piety and modesty... would look equally elegant in the same dress.²⁹

²⁶ Sade Andrea Zabala, "50 Possible Signs You May Have Colonial Mentality," June 8, 2017, accessed on July 18, 2019, <https://thoughtcatalog.com/sade-andria-zabala/2017/06/50-possible-signs-you-may-have-colonial-mentality/>.

²⁷ "The contextual meaning of class shifted from ethno-social to socio-economic, which beginning in around 1850, revolved around shared socio-cultural (in terms of education, lifestyles, friendships and associations) and economic (in terms of money or income, either by ownership of land or control of means of production) status. This replaced classifications previously based on race and hereditary status." Stephanie Marie R. Coo, "Clothing And The Colonial Culture Of Appearances In Nineteenth Century Spanish Philippines (1820-1896)" (PhD diss., Université Nice Sophia Antipolis, October 3, 2014), 24–29.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2–5, 17, 24–29, 145, 163, 168, 171.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.



As much as the colonized mimic the colonizers whether the Spanish or Americans, the colonizers also deemed their culture more superior and expected the colonized to mimic them. Sadly, the colonizers often perceived their mimicry with disdain, ridicule, or abhorrence. Sarah Steinbock-Pratt discusses the case of the Filipina students during the American Regime who were conflicted with the desire to please the new colonizers and at the same time their fellowmen who saw their American-style clothing as anti-nationalism and leaving the Maria Clara traditional style.

US teachers strongly encourage the wearing of American-style clothing as part of their campaign of body reform and uplift, viewing mestiza dress as an obstacle to modernizing Filipino women period. Teachers also recorded with pleasure when Filipinos in their towns began to adopt American dress, viewing this change as a first but crucial step in the process of creating Americanized colonial subjects.³⁰

Steinbock-Pratt concludes that the Filipina students created a hybrid identity that enabled them to move between two cultures very well, able to navigate in different circumstances appropriately to avoid scolding.³¹ Mimicry is ambivalence, having conflicted desires and confused identities. But the Filipina students in this case were able to apply mimicry and, in the end, construct a hybrid elite Filipino American identity that fused together selected Filipino and American cultures.

Nonetheless, mimicry is duplication and the desire to copy what was perceived as superior or better or best. The Filipinos today can easily find Coke more so than fresh coconut juice. They munch on potato chips more than banana chips. They like spam, hotdogs, bacon, and all the American canned goods. They eat burgers, fries, and pizzas. They dress up in denims and shirts. For some, they even celebrate American holidays like Halloween and Thanksgiving. This desire for the colonizer is now changing to a desire for another kind—the number one producer of drama series and manufacturer of skin care products—Korea. Filipinos today mimic Korean make-up, sing Korean songs, crazy over K-Pop stars, and watch endless Korean dramas online. Korean words slowly penetrated into Filipino vocabulary like *oppa* (woman calling an older man), *noona* (man calling an older woman), *anyohaseyo* (hello), *saranghamida* (I love you), and “Fighting!” (Don’t give up!). Archana Gupta writes, “People now do not imitate only the superior manners of the first world countries but they have started considering that whatever is foreign is the best.”³² Mimicry then is no longer just copying the west but the rest that have the best.

White is Beautiful

Doña Victorina was a very interesting character in the novel *Noli Me Tangere*. A native who despised her own ethnicity and her own people. She pretended to be a Spanish by putting powder on her face to become white, hoping the whiteness would hide her brown skin that would reveal her true identity. She would even dye her hair blonde and dressed up like one who came from the west. She detested Tagalog and spoke only Castillian but very poorly. Lastly, she married a Spanish. She is described as the “paragon of colonial mentality” by Capino, Gonzales, and Pineda who analyzed her character and concluded that “In her pretensions, she becomes ludicrous and

³⁰ Sarah Steinbock-Pratt, “‘It Gave Us Our Nationality’ – US Education, the Politics of Dress and Transnational Student Networks, 1901-45, in Gender, Imperialism, and Global Exchanges,” in *Gender, Imperialism and Global Exchanges*, eds. Stephan F. Miescher, Michele Mitchell, and Naoko Shibusawa (UK: Wiley & Sons, 2015), 185.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 191–200.

³² Archana Gupta, “The Role of ‘Mimicry’ in Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse with special reference to Homi Bhabha’s *Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse*,” *IRWLE*, Vol. 9, no. II (July 2013): 1.



grotesque.”³³ Vincent Rafael describes her presence as an embarrassment and shame. “She’s a figure of mistranslation, unable to see herself as such, a foreign presence oblivious to her foreignness.”³⁴ Her mimicry resulted to ridicule and mockery of herself and her identity.

Colonialism is often attributed as the origin of desire for whiteness. However, the natives in Pre-Hispanic Period were already drawn to the idea of beauty in whiteness. There were unmarried women from *principalia* class (upper class) who were referred as *binukot* or set apart. The word *binukot* also connotes secluded or hidden. They were beautiful maidens with fair and soft skin hidden from people and not allowed to work in the fields or any hard work. They were not only beautiful but intelligent women kept for possible marriages to *datu* (ruler) or desired by *datu*s as portrayed in epics.³⁵ The Philippine society in Pre-Hispanic Period was divided into three classes, namely, the *maharlikas* (the nobles or privilege ones), the *timaguas* (freemen; peasants who worked on the land and gave tribute to the *datu*), and the *alipin* (slaves).³⁶ This social stratification based on position and wealth and the colorism perpetuated by colonizers led to Filipinos desiring whiteness. Hence, we can infer that even before being colonized, the Filipinos have always associated white skin or fairness to beauty, white skin to the elite of the society, and white skin to prominence and success.

Jose Rizal describes Doña Victorina using rice powder to cover her face white.³⁷ Today, many Filipinos prefer white skin as opposed to the *kayumanggi* or brown skin as evidence of many whitening products like soap, lotion, deodorant, and cosmetics. The past histories of precolonial and colonial periods have created the notion and desire for whiteness. The Philippine movie and television entertainment, in the past and even in the present, endorses mestizos and mestizas, elevating beauty standards based on the westerner’s image. Many of the beauty pageant contestants were also mestizas. The fact is even the images of the saints and Jesus Christ in churches were painted white and European. Nevertheless, the biggest culprit for today’s desiring whiteness is this age of globalization wherein the spread and constant bombardment from media on advertisement of whitening products created in us a discontent. Research shows that approximately one out of two Filipinas had used some kind of whitening products.³⁸ They probably do not expect to turn white but at least a little whiter. There are those who would resort to skin-whitening glutathione injectables which the Philippine Dermatological Society (PDS) warned of

³³ Diosdado G. Capino, Maria Minerva A. Gonzalez, and Filipinas E. Pineda, *Rizal's Life, Works, and Writings: Their Impact on Our National Identity* (Makati: Goodwill Bookstore, 1977), 161.

³⁴ Vincent Rafael, “Foreignness and Vengeance: In Rizal’s *El Filibusterismo*,” in *Southeast Asia Over Three Generations: Essays Presented to Benedict R. O’G Anderson*, eds. James T. Siegel and Audrey R. Kahin (New York, Cornell University, 2003), fn27, 179.

³⁵ Maria Bernadette L. Abrera, “Seclusion and Veiling of Women: A Historical and Cultural Approach,” *UP Diliman Journals of Philippine Social Sciences Review*, Vol. 60, no. 1 (January 2008–December 2009): 35–39, 42, accessed on July 23, 2019,

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.1016.6346&rep=rep1&type=pdf>. See also Xiao Chua, “Mga Babaylan At Mga Binukot,” *Xiaotime*, March 8, 2013, accessed on July 23, 2019, <https://xiaochua.net/2013/03/08/xiaotime-8-march-2013-mga-babaylan-at-mga-binukot/>.

³⁶ The Philippines during the pre-Spanish period is not a unified country. The lowland people reside in the coastal areas, forming small communities of 100 to 500 people called barangay. These barangays are more of a kinship groups than political groups. Each barangay is ruled by a *datu*, *rajah*, or chief. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood. Manuel A. Caoili, *The Origins of Metropolitan Manila: A Political and Social Analysis* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1988), 26–27.

³⁷ Jose Rizal, *Noli me Tangere* (trans. Harold Augenbraum, New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 277.

³⁸ Francine Singson, “Colonialism’s Role in the Success of the Filipino Skin Whitening Industry,” Paper Presented at The National Conference On Undergraduate Research (NCUR), Eastern Washington University, Cheney, WA, April 16-18, 2015, 385.



possible side effects.³⁹ This desire to be white or to have fair skin is no longer just for women but even for men. Our society has encouraged a culture of beauty based on whiteness. Mimicry is imitation or copying but never attaining the real thing.

Mimic Christ

Mimicry is desiring for the colonizer and whatever he has. Mimicry is never the real thing; it is a duplicate that may not necessarily be a perfect copy or attain the approval of the colonizer. Mimicry can turn into a mockery or disdain when applied inappropriately. Mimicry is an ambiguous and a liminal state that seeks acceptance and recognition. The colonized were subjected to centuries of dominion and rule that stripped them of worth and value as a human beings. They were deemed to be barbarians and uncivilized. The white superiority created a discontent with their color and indigenous culture. The colonizer had successfully instilled in the minds of the colonized that they were inferior and worthless beings. The yoke of the colonizer was burdensome and heavy, deceptive and unreliable, painful and destructive. The effects of colonization continue to this day as colonial mindset creates a desire for the west and perception that the west is the best.

In the church, we continued with the Christian traditions handed down by the colonizer. The Roman Catholics mimic the grand European churches and the images were carved with European features. The Protestants mimic the structures of contemporary mega churches in the United States, creating a duplicate of the churches they saw in the West. They mimic the preaching style, worship songs, and even the programs and trainings. Is mimicry all bad? When is mimicry not appropriate?

In retrospect, the evangelical churches in the Philippines have been bombarded for decades with many canned American Christian materials such as books, music, movies, Bible study methods, seminars, evangelism and discipleship tools, church growth programs, materials for cell groups, care groups, and counseling. We even patronize American Christian personalities and celebrities. It seems that the Philippines has turned into a laboratory to test the “feasibility” and effectiveness of many American Christian materials. The Philippines has been a solid market for these products and theologies. For instance, we have the Campus Crusade for Christ, IVCF and the Navigators operating and serving in colleges and universities throughout the country. The Four Spiritual Laws, the Jesus Film, and the transferable concepts Bible study materials are used extensively to evangelize and disciple not only in school settings but also in churches. Some of the trainings and seminars that are widely accepted by evangelical churches are the Child Evangelism Fellowship’s Wordless Book and Sunday school trainings, Gospel Light VBS, James Kennedy’s Evangelism Explosion, Bruce Wilkinson’s Walk Thru the Bible, Kay Arthur’s Precepts Upon Precepts, Rick Warren’s Purpose Driven Church, and Willow Creek’s Global Leadership Summit. I am truly grateful for all these wonderful and enriching materials for the evangelical churches have benefited much from them. Nevertheless, there is a need to critically engage with the materials to properly apply them in the Philippine context...⁴⁰

³⁹ Marje Pelayo, “Skin experts warn of the dangers of intravenous Glutathione or ‘gluta drip’,” *UNTV News and Rescue*, November 30, 2018, accessed on July 22, 2019, <https://www.untvweb.com/news/skin-experts-warn-of-the-dangers-of-intravenous-glutathione-or-gluta-drip/>.

⁴⁰ Juliet Lee Uytanlet, “Pride and Prejudice, Colonialism and Post-Colonialism in the Philippine Chinese Context: How IBS Can be a Liberating Methodology to Find the Truth to be Set Free,” in *The Asbury Journal*, Vol. 68, no. 1 (2013): 63–64.



Jesus said in Mt 11:28–30, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Samson Uytanlet pictures Jesus giving an invitation to those who have not yet followed him. Jesus is calling and waiting for us to take his yoke, to learn from him, to follow him, to mimic him. The yoke Jesus is offering is not the same as that of foreign colonizers.

The image of the believer being yoked together with Jesus is a beautiful one, with Jesus walking alongside us as we journey this life; but Jesus did not say, “be yoked together with me.” Instead, he said, “Take my yoke upon you” (Matt 11:29). In short, Jesus is not the other ox plowing alongside the believer, but the farmer driving the animals as they work. The reason being under Jesus’ yoke can be an enjoyable one is because the yoke driver is “gentle and humble in heart,” and those who obey will not be burdened but can “find rest” for their souls, because his yoke is easy and his burden is light (11:29-30). Jesus’ invitation is an invitation to be under his kingship, a rule characterized by gentleness and not tyranny, and thus, unlike the oppressive rule of the Romans.⁴¹

Conclusion

With all the mimicry and the desire for the west or whatever is the best, one can easily fall into the temptation of greed, discontentment, and many other sins. Mimicry in the context of colonial discourse tends to be negative and a mockery. However, when mimicry is placed in the context of imitating Christ, this can serve as a positive theological discourse. Jesus is the ultimate model for us to mimic. He himself challenged us to be his followers, his disciples. Sadly, churches today treat discipleship as a program, a seminar, a training, or a bible study material. Discipleship is a lifestyle. Discipleship is to follow Christ. It is helping other sinners to know and follow Christ. The present world has a lot to offer and to sell but the ultimate “need” we must seek to find is God’s kingdom and his righteousness and then we will have everything.

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⁴¹ Samson L. Uytanlet, *Matthew: A Pastoral and Contextual Commentary* (ed. Federico Villanueva, *Asia Bible Commentary Series*, UK: Langham Global Library, 2017), 126.



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