ARTICLE

Real Fake Skin: Semiotics of Skin Lightening in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Skin lightening is a global industry that claims to transform skin as a way to transform persons. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and skincare advertisements in the Philippines, this paper considers how the skin is drawn into semiotic frameworks that rely on implicit ideological links between race and nation by a capitalist modernity that disciplines a desire for commodified emblems of class distinction. Skin qualities become linked to race (e.g., "light" and "dark" skin tones) and age (e.g., "smooth" and "rough" skin textures), combining a desire for skin lightening with an anxiety about skin aging. Within this racial and temporal framing, lightening and aging apply not only to the skin but also to the nation, as the Philippines grapples with the seemingly competing pulls of Western modernity and postcolonial sovereignty. Reconstituted as desirable past and desirable future, "whiteness" is harnessed by skin lightening advertising to promise "light modern juvenescence" in a manner that allows persons and nations to remain real, not become fake. Consumers are thus recruited not as striving fakes, but as modern subjects who have moved beyond whiteness as colonial desire for racial Europeanness, and toward whiteness as cosmopolitan desire for youthfulness and modernity. This makes skin lightening no longer about becoming something you are not, but about fulfilling who you have always been. [Keywords: Skin lightening, semiotics, fake, Temporality, modernity, Philippines]

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During fieldwork in the Philippines, one of my research participants, Gemma, brought up the subject of skin lightening. I was conducting ethnographic research on "Taglish" ("mixed" Tagalog-English; see Reyes 2020) at a private university in Manila. Gemma, who was a Ph.D. student at the university, told me that an advertisement for Belo Men, a men's line of skin lightening products, illustrated the connections between Taglish, light skin, and *sosyal* [high class] (Figure 1, left). The ad promises that "a little whitening makes a big difference": "10% lighter. 100% more sosyal." It features a young man tossing his car key to a valet and saying: "Dude, make *alaga* [take care of] my car ha!" Gemma regarded the young man's speech as signaling upper-class Taglish, but his "crappy" car (a Kia?) as signaling his middle-class status. Even though the ad suggests, according to Gemma, that "you can look (and sound) rich even without being rich," Gemma claimed that its promise of upward mobility as a result of skin lightening is false.

Figure 1: Belo Men.

This advertisement, from 2012, was part of a series of three Belo Men ads that ignited a social media uproar for its "racist undertones," generating public responses such as: "I am dark-skinned and proud," and "Sorry, this is too social-climber-ish" (ABS-CBN News 2012). In these ads, being "10% lighter" made a man not only "100% more sosyal," but also brought him "100% more numbers" from fawning women (Figure 1, center) and made him "100% approved" by his future father-in-law (Figure 1, right). Taken together, these ads lay out a chronological narrative for middle-class men who alter their skin and language: drive to a nightclub, meet beautiful women there, and marry into the upper-class family of one of these women. This narrative conflates the temporal unfolding of a consumer's

life with the temporal unfolding of upward mobility, such that middle-class men who use skin lightening products are promised access to elite circles otherwise denied to dark-skinned Filipinos. Yet, as indicated by the public outcry over these ads, such consumers can also be regarded as social-climbing "fakes," as colonial subjects who desire whiteness and mobility, perhaps unlike "real" Filipinos, who are content with their skin color and social status (Reyes 2017b).

As a user of skin lightening products, Nina, another research participant, illustrates how difficult it can be to manage such perceptions of light-skin desire. Nina complained that when she was a young girl in the 1960s, her mother called her "dark" and "ugly," and routinely applied thick layers of skin lightening cream to her body. Nina said that it burned. Now in her 60s, Nina still uses a skin lightening product: a "whitening" soap made by Belo, the same company behind the Belo Men skin lightening line above. She said she uses the soap to smooth out her skin tone because of age spots. That is, she uses a skin lightening product not to "become fake," not to strive for skin that is not hers, but rather to "remain real," to keep her skin as it was before aging caused dark blotches. Her daughter, however, disagrees. She told me that she teases Nina about "her soap" and for wanting to be light-skinned, not just to prevent age spots, but to continue the practice her grandmother introduced to her mother decades ago: value light skin and devalue dark skin. That is, whereas Nina positions herself as a modern subject desiring youthfulness, her daughter positions her as a colonial subject desiring whiteness.

Inspired by the vignettes of Gemma and Nina, this article closely analyzes the semiotic and temporal processes through which Philippine skin lightening advertising constructs its main concepts and distinctions: dark and light; old and young; fake and real; colonial and modern; and middle-class and upper-class. These concepts interact in the following ways. First, when skin lightening is linked to a striving middle-class figure (as in the ads shown in Figure 1), it can be regarded as a practice of the colonial subject to become fake—that is, become something they are not. This class-mobile figure is framed as a colonial mimic (Bhabha 1984), using skin lightening products to fake an upper-class, modern identity. Here, the binary between dark skin and light skin is temporally organized such that the former is placed in the past while the latter is in the future. Second, when skin lightening is linked to a legitimately upper-class figure (as in the ads below), it can be regarded as a practice of the modern subject to

remain real—that is, maintain who they have always been. Far from being the colonial subject mimicking the colonizer, this figure embodies the modern sovereign Philippines, free from colonial domination. Here, light skin points to national modernity, youthfulness, and elite status, placed in both the past and the present, and hopefully the future. Skin lightening is thus only a "cosmopolitan pretension" (Besnier 2009:239) when done by social climbers, not the elite. That is, for the middle class, whiteness and skin lightening can point to colonial mimicry and colonial subjugation; for the upper class, they can point to the modern subject who belongs to and exceeds the sovereign nation-state freed from its colonial past.

Skin lightening is a global industry that claims to transform skin as a way to transform persons. Analyzing skin lightening advertisements in the Philippines in the early 21st century, this article considers how the skin is drawn into semiotic frameworks that rely on implicit ideological links between race and nation by a capitalist modernity that disciplines a desire for commodified emblems of class distinction. Focusing on three Olay skin care commercial ads that contrast with the Belo Men print ads above, the analysis explores how skin qualities linked to race (e.g., "light" and "dark" skin tones) and age (e.g., "smooth" and "rough" skin textures) combine a desire for skin lightening with an anxiety about skin aging. Within this racial and temporal framing, lightening and aging apply not only to the skin but also to the nation, as the Philippines grapples with the seemingly competing pulls of Western modernity and postcolonial sovereignty, particularly since the late 20th century. Reconstituted as desirable past and desirable future, "whiteness" is harnessed by Olay advertising to promise "light modern juvenescence" in a manner that allows persons and nations to remain real, not become fake. Olay ads thus recruit consumers not as striving fakes, but as modern subjects who have moved beyond whiteness as colonial desire for racial Europeanness, and toward whiteness as cosmopolitan desire for youthfulness and modernity. This makes skin lightening no longer about becoming something you are not, but about fulfilling who you have always been.

Challenging the familiar analysis of skin lightening as a simple form of colonial mimicry or class aspiration in the Global South, this article makes three main contributions. The first is a further theorization of the ontology of "fake" (Reyes 2017b) as neither objective fact nor absolute quality that inheres in entities or events, but a characteristic that is perceivable only as it co-occurs and contrasts with other qualities, such as "light" and "dark,"

and other constructs constitutive of social types, such as modernity, class, race, and gender. That the same practice (i.e., skin lightening) can be attributed different motivations and outcomes (i.e., to become fake or to remain real) requires a careful analysis of the co-articulation of categories. The second contribution is a demonstration of a semiotic approach to temporal structure, which captures the formation of categories, subjectivities, and their relations more precisely than referential analysis alone. This article uses the case study of skin lightening to illustrate how "skin" and "age" are referentially explicit categories, while "nation" and "race" are formed implicitly through sign processes that organize temporalities. These historically and socially situated categories are further mediated by capitalism and commodity consumption. The third contribution is a careful consideration of how "whiteness" becomes reconceptualized in the skin lightening industry as consumer desire is retooled: from whiteness as a category of racial Europeanness that is the target of colonial desire, to whiteness as a category of youthfulness and modernity that is the target of cosmopolitan desire.

Skin, Race, Language

Anthropology and related disciplines have studied the skin as a fertile site of value production. From early work that links "pale" skin to youthfulness and "hairless" skin to sexual selection (Darwin 1871) to recent work that links "smooth" and "wrinkly" skin to assessments of human beauty (Fink et al. 2001) and age (Coupland 2007), scholarly research has explored how values attached to the skin connect to values attached to the people contained inside it. Yet the "social skin" (Turner 1980) defines not only individuals but also categories and their relations, particularly when considering practices of skin modification and manipulation. Examples of modification include tattooed bodies as "skinscape" in South Africa (Peck and Stroud 2015) and Hawai'i (Hiramoto 2015) where the construction of mobile identities complicates notions of place. Even the manipulation of nonhuman skin can be connected to the judgment of people as well as global economic shifts. For example, Joseph Hankins (2014) examines how the profession of tanning animal hides as unclean labor in Japan, which has been tied to the stigmatization of the Buraku people, changes under multicultural discourses and liberalized markets. Language takes a central role across much of this research, approaching the materiality of

the skin not as an ontological pregiven, but as the continuous outcome of discourses that entangle the skin in societal processes of value production (cf. Chumley 2017).

One main area of focus centers on the skin as a site of racial difference, which has been introduced, debated, and revisited centuries over (e.g., Boas 1912, Bonilla-Silva 2004, Du Bois 1897, Kant 1999, Kim 2001). Anthropological work has explored this question from various angles, including how geography and climate affect global skin variation and hence racial categorization (Jablonski 2006) and how the skin can be taken up in a wide range of locales as material evidence of racial difference—for example, in the social classification of Creole Louisiana (Domínguez 1977) and in the performance of blackness in Cuba (Wirtz 2014). Within racialized groups, the politics of skin tone, often termed "colorism," has also been the subject of much scholarship (e.g., Rondilla and Spickard 2007, Spears 2002). In their research among Puerto Rican communities in New York City, for example, both Ana Celia Zentella (1997) and Bonnie Urciuoli (1996) note how Puerto Ricans rely on linguistic and other behavioral signs to discern and value the skin tone of other Puerto Ricans, even in the absence of purported evidence from physical bodies.

The skin has been drawn into debates about the mutability of race. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, for example, Frantz Fanon (1967) explores the extent to which racial difference is inscribed on the surface of the body. On the one hand, Fanon argues that blackness is "overdetermined from the outside," meaning that visible signs of racial difference—"the dark and unarguable evidence of my own blackness"—make him "the slave not of an idea that others have of me, but of my own appearance" (1967:116). On the other hand, Fanon notes that beneath this "epidermal schema" are discursive forces that constitute and interrupt racial ontologies. That is, even though racial difference may seem written indelibly on the body, Fanon suggests that language can transform the skin. He writes "The Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately Whiter—that is, he will come closer to being a real human being—in direct ratio to his mastery of the French Language…Mastery of language affords remarkable power…To express it in genetic terms, his phenotype undergoes a definitive, an absolute mutation" (1967:18–19).

Yet this tension between racial overdetermination and racial mutability deserves more than a literal interpretation. As Fanon begins to clarify, the skin of the black French speaker does not actually become more *white*,

but the black French speaker may become more *human*. If others evaluate this speaker as white, this should not be confused for seeing this speaker as racially white. To support this, a long scholarly tradition illustrates how speakers, who use linguistic forms that are ideologically linked to racial others, do not become those racial others but take on stances stereotypically associated with them, thereby reinforcing, not disrupting, racial ontologies (e.g., Bucholtz 1999, Chun 2001, Hall 1995, Hill 2008, Lo 1999, Reyes 2005). More recent work asks not how language transforms race, but how race transforms language (Flores and Rosa 2015, Lo and Rosa 2015): how racialized bodies come to influence how language is heard, resulting, for instance, in a white American teacher hearing "he was" and "she was" as grammatically nonstandard when uttered by her black students (Alim 2004).

Semiotics of Skin Qualia: "Light" and "Dark"

If it is difficult for the skin to racially transform through linguistic and other symbolic practice, it is easy for the skin to transform from dark to light if the skin lightening industry is to be believed. It is important first to unpack the semiotic labor behind the attributions and distinctions of dark and light that the skin lightening industry presupposes. In a Peircean (1998) framework, abstract qualities like "darkness" and "lightness" are qualisigns: potential components of yet unrealized signs. Qualisigns enable people to recognize particular entities as displaying such qualities. That is, qualisigns are experienced as qualia when they are felt in material form, as "qualities instantiated or embodied in entitites or events" (Chumley and Harkness 2013:5). Since qualia are experiences of sensuous qualities, they can be perceived not as the attributed phenomena that they are but as intrinsic features that appear "natural" or "real."

Qualia are central in the creation of value (Munn 1986). In fact, the entire skin lightening industry hinges on the presupposition that people differentially value qualisigns ("darkness" and "lightness"), experience these as qualia ("dark" and "light" skin), and reproduce these value differentials through consumer practices. In such systems of value production, qualia function in at least three important ways. First, qualia emerge through "axes of differentiation" (Gal 2013) that hierarchically organize difference. "Light" skin, for example, only has value—in fact, only makes sense—as it emerges in an explicit or implicit contrast with "dark" skin. Second, since

qualia are felt to be manifested in material form (in this case, the skin), they become "bundled" (Keane 2003) with other qualities that supposedly accompany that thing. For example, the "lightness" of skin is not perceived in isolation, but in co-occurrence with other perceived signs that are felt to accompany it, such as "smoothness," "youthfulness," and "Taglish." Third, qualia can get attached to social categories through the establishment of sign relationships, such that light skin can be indexical of (point to) or be iconic of (resemble) person types. That is, "light" skin not only emerges in a contrast or bundle with other qualia, but also in relation to person types that are supposedly contained inside it.

For example, light skin in the Philippines can be indexical of at least two distinct processes of which it appears to be the causal product: familial lineage and commodity use. Both are tied to ideas about people: the kinds of people who have light skin because they are recognized as racially mixed with "lighter" races, and the kinds of people who have light skin because they use skin lightening products. But light skin can be more than indexical. It can become naturalized as iconic of a person's character, such that light skin not only points to a process that caused it, but also comes to resemble the person who is contained inside it—the figure of the *mestizo* [mixed race] elite. "Mixed" skin (not to mention "mixed" language) can stand in iconized relation to "mixed" people (Reyes 2017a, 2020), whose cultural orientations can be seen as indeterminate, whose national loyalty can be called into question, and whose bodies can be recognized as containing the physical traces of the desire to be modern (Rafael 1995).

Light Modern Juvenescence: Class, Race, Colonialism, Aging

Although many view the beauty ideal in the Philippines as a by-product of a "colonial mentality" that desires the supposed light skin of Western European descendants, two competing discourses complicate the straightforwardness of this claim. One discourse argues that even before colonialism or encounters with the West, many Asian societies already favored light, smooth skin—linking dark, rough skin to the peasantry and physical outdoor labor (Wagatsuma 1967). In the Philippines, another discourse claims that light skin can also stand for Chinese skin—its valorization tied to the rise of the Chinese mestizo elite under Spanish and American colonialisms (Anderson 1988, Hau 2014). In both discourses, whiteness as an index of racial Europeanness is not central, though still

influential either in reinforcing a pre-existing proclivity for light skin or in shaping a standard of Asian beauty modeled on the supposed paler skin of East Asians (Glenn 2008, Rondilla 2009). All three perspectives share the view that light skin signals class distinction because of its association with status, privilege, wealth, and mobility (Ashikari 2003, Goon and Craven 2003, Leslie 2004).

But what is class and class distinction in the Philippines? The Philippines has been conceptualized as coupling high concentrations of poverty among the "dark-skinned" rural and urban masses, with high concentrations of wealth and political power across generations of "light-skinned" landowning elites (Francia 2010). The sense that a "new middle class" (Cespedes and Gibbs 1972) was emerging in the 20th century has heightened over the past several decades due to the rapid growth of the Philippine call center industry (Tupas and Salonga 2016) and overseas labor (Lorente 2017). At the same time, middle-class identity has become a site of tension, driven by anxieties about modern excess and social-climbing fakes (Reyes 2017a, b). The response to the Belo Men ads above illustrates this class anxiety in the realm of skin lightening, as a middle-class character is portrayed as attempting to impersonate the upper class by altering his skin, language, and other signs.

As argued by Jemima Pierre (2008), who links contemporary, local articulations of skin lightening in Ghana (see also Asante 2016) to the historical, global valorization of whiteness, race and colonialism remain significant factors in the identification and value of skin color in the decolonizing world. Anne McClintock (1995), for example, shows how advertisements in the 1880s for Pears' soap in England depict its ability to magically cleanse blackness from a boy's body (but not face), illustrating the association between not only darkness and dirt but also darkness and primitivity that benefits from the imperial benevolence of capitalist modernity. In addition, Amina Mire (2014) notes how the aging white body is implicitly racialized in contemporary skin lightening advertising aimed at white women. She argues that European concerns about the vulnerability and degradation of whiteness in colonial encounters shape how these ads link aging to darkening (e.g., "hyper-pigmentation," "age spots") and promise to "cleanse" and "restore" youthful white skin.

These studies reveal linked logics of skin transformation: as one becomes more modern, one becomes more light; as one becomes more old, one becomes more dark. Here, lightness and darkness become temporally

framed in all directions: lightness as both juvenescence (past) and modernity (future), and darkness as both primitivity (past) and senescence (future). Figure 2 captures these chronological movements along two racialized axes: "dark primitivity" to "light modernity" across the historical scale of the nation, and "light juvenescence" to "dark senescence" across the ontogenetic scale of the individual. Skin lightening advertising is situated within these axes of differentiation, temporality, and scale, combining one kind of future with one kind of past: preventing the "darkness" of undesirable colonial pasts and undesirable aging bodies, and providing the "lightness" of desirable capitalist futures and desirable young bodies—that is, a white-future-past or "light modern juvenescence."

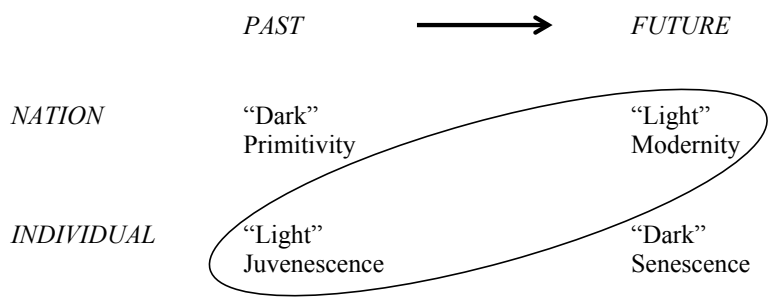

Figure 2. Light Modern Juvenescence

Skin Lightening in Asia and the Philippines

Skin lightening technologies emerged before and during colonial encounters and extend into the contemporary global marketing of biotechnology products that promise light skin and often more (Mire 2014). From honey in Korea (Jeon 1987) to powder in Japan (Ashikari 2003) to turmeric in India (Li et al. 2008), various methods of skin lightening have long been used throughout Asia. As new commodities, technologies, and imperatives are introduced, the desire to lighten skin may appear timeless, though the range of products offered is not. Numerous skin lighteners at different price points enter and exit the market: from products targeting the poor, such as cheap creams that pose threats of mercury poisoning, to products targeting the rich, such as intravenous treatments (glutathione), which are a status marker despite health risks.

Contemporary skin lightening advertising in Asia often promotes whitening as not always the only—or even most important—feature (Li et al. 2008, Rondilla 2009). Here, the desire for whiteness, which can typify the shameful colonial mentality, is overshadowed by the desire for youthfulness, the primary focus of the skin care industry in Western markets. Yet anti-aging products still market whiteness—not as racial Europeanness but as modern juvenescense—to cater to the Asian consumer. Presenting flawless, fair baby skin as the norm and changes in skin across the lifespan as unnatural, the skin lightening industry in Asia emphasizes its ability to restore skin to its natural, light state through scientific advancements. Promises to both "lighten" and "rejuvenate" skin are combined within a capitalist imperative to control the body (Crawford 1985, Miller 2003), framing light modern juvenescence as both desire and duty.

Asia's skin lightening industry boom began in the 1970s with the introduction of *Fair and Lovely* cream in India in 1975 (Runkle 2005). Asia now represents one of the most profitable markets for skin lightening products (Mire 2014), with the Philippines reporting one of the highest rates of usage (Rondilla 2009). In the Philippines, the growth of the skin lightening industry coincided with the presidency of Corazon Aquino (1986–1992). Following the People Power Revolution that deposed the Marcos regime (1965–1986), President Aquino set out to establish her populist-nationalist credibility by decreasing American military presence with the closing of Clark Air Base, and by restoring economic confidence with the building of enormous shopping malls. The new sites of popular gathering became these mega-malls that were to drive a capitalist economy that centered on the marketing of commodities through the fair-skinned body of the mestiza and the linguistic allure of Taglish: material and communicative practices both out of range—but not out of gaze or earshot—of the majority of Filipinos (Rafael 1995). Vicente Rafael frames this capitalist practice within "mestiza envy": the envy both of and for light-skinned Filipinas whose bodily and linguistic hybridity "signifies the privilege associated with collaborating with and containing the workings of power" (1995:105). The supposed prosperity symbolized by mestizas and mega-malls was one of appearances and sounds of economic health as the foreign national debt continued to increase. The Philippine skin lightening industry grew alongside these narratives and anxieties of national progress and decline in the late 20th century.

Olay Total Effects: "Light" Meets "Smooth"

Skin lightening products, such as Olay Total Effects (Figure 3, left), were used by several of my research participants. Marketed and sold in the Philippines and in other parts of the world, Olay Total Effects is a product collection offered by Olay, an American company that began as Oil of Olay in South Africa in 1952 and has since expanded into an international "Billion Dollar Brand" for Proctor & Gamble. Olay Total Effects helped build the lucrative anti-aging product market when it was launched in 2000. According to its marketing campaign in the Philippines, Olay Total Effects "is not only the best whitening and anti-aging product rolled into one, it is also the most affordable product for the average, beauty-conscious Filipina" (PEP 2011). Olay Total Effects claims to fight "the seven signs of aging": "lines," "dark spots," "uneven tone," "dryness," "pores," "sagging skin," and "roughness." Though couched in the language of anti-aging, skin lightening benefits are smuggled in by reference to "dark spots" and "uneven tone." Olay also offers less expensive product collections in the Philippines that center primarily on whitening: Natural White and White Radiance (Figure 3, center and right). This article focuses on Olay Total Effects for three reasons: it is one of the principal collections that is promoted most heavily by the Filipina celebrity spokespeople who are selected as the Face of Olay; it shows how "light" and "smooth" qualia are bundled together and in contrast to "dark" and "rough"; and it illustrates how the priorities of the skin lightening industry have shifted to emphasize anti-aging in more upscale consumer markets (Mire 2014).

Figure 3. Olay Total Effects, Natural White, and White Radiance (left to right).

The analysis centers on three commercials from 2010–2011 that feature Filipina celebrity spokespeople in their late 30s and early 40s: Miriam

Quiambao and Kris Aquino. Figure 4 features screenshots, taken from two of the commercials, that demonstrate how Quiambao and Aquino are exhibited in ecstatic, tactile co-presence with the commodity (Inoue 2007): touching the product, touching themselves, gazing and smiling at "you." Quiambao was the first Face of Olay when Olay Total Effects became available in the Philippines in 2007. Quiambao is a Filipina television and film personality and former beauty queen. She is not considered mestiza, though she is regarded as somewhat lighter-skinned and taller than the average Filipina. Aquino became the Face of Olay in 2011. Aquino is a Filipina television and film personality and producer, and also daughter of former President Corazon Aquino, and sister of former President Benigno Aquino. She is considered light-skinned Chinese mestiza. Like many Filipina celebrities, both Quiambao and Aquino typically use Taglish in their many product endorsements and media appearances. These three commercials, however, are all in English with the exception of four Tagalog words. Unlike the Belo Men ads, these Olay commercials did not cause a public backlash about social-climbing fakes or colonial mimics. In fact, the few comments they did receive were overwhelmingly positive, such as, "wow *subrang ganda at ang* flawless [very beautiful and flawless]…love you miss kris" (Olay 2011).

Figure 4. Miriam Quiambao (Left) and Kris Aquino.

Establishing Intimacy, Desire, and Agency

The three commercials establish intimacy, desire, and agency through deictically-anchored "body talk" (Bucholtz and Hall 2016)—namely, talk about "my," "your," and "her" body—in the marketing of skin lightening products (cf. Inoue 2007). The effects form a gendered consuming subject of light modern juvenescence. Such intimate body talk is also found in the ethnographic vignette of Nina above, where talk about skin lightening that spans three generations—grandmother, daughter, granddaughter—is

built on a gendered intimacy not only across kin relations but also across longstanding discussion and use of the commodity itself ("her soap").

The commercials establish an intimate "participation framework" (Goffman 1981) by constituting and recruiting three subject positions—spokesperson, voiceover, and viewer—into roles and relationships relative to the commodity. The spokesperson—either Quiambao or Aquino—is pictured alone in the first two commercials. But both commercials contain two voices: the spokesperson and the disembodied voiceover of a female-sounding narrator. The third commercial takes the form of a first-person testimonial, containing only the voice of the spokesperson. The viewer is directly addressed in all three commercials, whether linguistically with "you" (in the first two commercials) or visually with the spokesperson gazing directly into the camera (in all three commercials). All three parties—spokesperson, voiceover, and viewer—are presupposed as gendered autonomous subjects who desire and consume, and thus are capable of controlling their bodies. The "I/you/she" "thinks," "believes," "wants," "realizes," "chooses," and so on.

Below is a transcript from the first commercial from 2010 (Olay 2010), which features Quiambao:

Voiceover: can you believe these pictures were taken years apart?
how does she keep her skin looking great?
her secret is Olay Total Effects
proven to effectively fight not just one
but seven signs of skin aging
so that you too can maintain your youthful look
over the years
Quiambao: Total Effects promised to keep me looking young
and it proved it
Voiceover: Olay Total Effects
love the skin you're in

In this commercial, the viewer is directly addressed with "you" and is recruited as an onlooker alongside the voiceover: watching and discussing "her," Quiambao, as she smiles and touches her face, and alternates her gaze from her body to "you." An intimacy enshrines the moment as the voiceover invites—in fact, assumes—"you" to wonder about "her skin" and "her secret," then promises that "you too" can have it and know it.

The participation framework shifts when Quiambao becomes a spokesperson that directly addresses the viewer. She removes herself from being discussed in the third person by positioning herself as a direct interlocutor, making this an even more intimate encounter.

Next is a transcript from the second commercial from 2011 (Olay 2011), which features Aquino:

Aquino: when you're younger you think
being *maputi* [light-skinned; lit. white] is everything
until you see that first wrinkle
then you realize
the whitening cream you're using now
might not be enough
so out with the old
in with the new
Voiceover: challenge your whitening habit with Olay Total Effects
now it's possible to have the whitening you want
plus other benefits your skin might need
to fight the seven signs of aging
Aquino: growing up doesn't have to mean growing old
that's why I choose Olay Total Effects
Voiceover: challenge what's possible

Similar to the first commercial, the viewer is addressed with a "you," but this time by both the voiceover and Aquino, as the spokesperson. As she smiles and touches her face, Aquino gazes at "you" while she assumes and recaps a journey that "you" have already taken: the younger "you" was only concerned with light skin, but saw a wrinkle and realized whitening cream is not enough. The voiceover confirms: "you" have a whitening habit and desire but also have skin with other needs. In Aquino's last line, she switches to first person to declare an "I" who "chooses" a solution to the problems they have witnessed in "your" life.

Last is a transcript from the third commercial from 2012 (Olay 2012), which again features Aquino:

Aquino: a lot has changed in my life
dati [back then] it was just me
now it's me, Josh, and Bimby

and from the movies to TV
and now Queen of All Media *na* [already]
but the years don't show on my skin
thanks to Olay Total Effects
it fights not just one
but seven signs of aging
so after all this time
my skin looks young and radiant *pa rin* [still]

This last commercial functions as a first-person testimonial. Similar to the other commercials, Aquino, as the spokesperson, smiles and touches her face as she gazes directly and speaks intimately to the viewer, this time about "my life" and "my skin," creating an immediate co-presence. As with the other commercials, the participation framework is characterized by an intimacy in which to discuss personal details about family, career, and body.

Across these advertisements, the relentless smiling, touching, gazing, and "I/you/she"-ing draw spokesperson, voiceover, and viewer into an immediate co-presence. Intimacy is further established as the viewer is recruited into a shared aspiration to be "young" and "white," as well as a shared agency to "choose" a product to deliver this promise. As a result, the gendered consuming subject is formed through disciplining a desire for the qualia of light modern juvenescence, a bundle of "lightness" and "smoothness" that is set in contrast to the undesirable "darkness" and "roughness" of the present and future body.

Establishing Attention to Temporalities of Life and Nation

Within this emergent frame of intimacy, desire, and agency is the organizing principle of time (also found in the Belo Men ads above). Across the three commercials, time is invoked referentially: for example, "over the years," "growing old," and "after all this time." But time is also invoked semiotically: particularly when the spokesperson appears with a photo of her younger self; and when Aquino re-enacts her younger self across a two-decade span. The semiotic and temporal organization of these moments illustrates how the viewer is instructed to attend to and feel about the passing of time, in both life and nation.

Across all three commercials, the same "poetic structure" (Jakobson 1960) organizes the temporal sequence of the spokesperson with a photo of her younger self (Figure 5). First, she appears with the photo, gazing at the viewer (Figure 5, left column). Next, she shifts her gaze to the photo (Figure 5, middle column). Finally, she shifts her gaze back to the viewer, while performing some action to the photo (pushing it, lowering it, cuddling it) (Figure 5, right column, top to bottom, respectively). This sequence relies on three conjoined semiotic processes: from gaze (sign) to photo (object), from photo (sign) to past self (object), from past self (sign) to evaluation of past (object).

Figure 5. Spokesperson with photo.

First, the gaze (sign) comes to stand for the photo (object). As the spokesperson gazes at the viewer and touches the photo, she creates a co-presence, as if looking and speaking directly to "you" about "this." The movement of the gaze—first on viewer, then on picture, then on viewer again—instructs the viewer to attend to the photo. In this sense, the gaze functions as a sign that indexes (points to) its object, the photo. The spokesperson and viewer are drawn into the same here-and-now frame, and the spokesperson's eyes invite the viewer to join her to contemplate a there-and-then frame.

Next, the photo (sign) comes to stand for the past self (object). Here, the photo functions as a sign of past self, in that it is taken to stand in a

relation of resemblance to it. In other words, the photo, which was the object indexed by the gaze above, is now the sign, which stands in iconic relation to its own object (past self). This divides the spokesperson's self into past and present, and invites viewers to contemplate the relationship between the two. In the second commercial (Figure 5, middle row), the icon (i.e., photo) of past self marks distinction, not adequation, with present self (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). That is, past self was only concerned with being "white" (e.g., "when you're younger you think being *maputi* is everything"); present self has additional concerns, namely aging. Thus, the photo stands for past self, not present self, because they do not "think alike." However, in the first commercial (Figure 5, top row) and third commercial (Figure 5, bottom row), the icons of past self mark adequation, not distinction, with present self. But it is not a claim about thought; it is a claim about appearance (e.g., "can you believe these pictures were taken years apart?"; "the years don't show on my skin"). Here, icons of past self function as icons of present self because they "look alike." Thus, in the first and third commercials, the photo stands for past self *and* present self.

Finally, the past self (sign) comes to stand for an evaluation of the past (object). Recall that in the second commercial, past and present selves do not stand in iconic relation to one another because they do not "think alike." Here the past self (as photo-icon) becomes a sign as it gives rise to an interpretant: a lowering of past self as if casting it aside (Figure 5, middle right). This interpretant links the sign (past self) to an object, which is an evaluation of the past as requiring *disposal*: that is, the past must be replaced by the present. In contrast, recall that in the first and third commercials, past and present selves stand in iconic relation to one another because they "look alike." But interestingly, these past selves give rise to different interpretants: a forceful push of past self (Figure 5, top right), and an affectionate cuddle of past self (Figure 5, bottom right). Pushing past self links the sign (past self) to an object, which is an evaluation of the past as *insignificant*: that is, since the past is the same as the present, the past is rendered unlamentable. Cuddling past self, however, links the sign (past self) to a different object, which is an evaluation of the past as requiring *preservation*: that is, since the past must remain the present, the past is embraced tightly.

Regardless of the different evaluations of the past (disposal, insignificance, preservation), they all lead to the same capitalist imperative in the present: buy this product now to "lighten" and "smooth" your skin. If the

past is characterized by a precious youthfulness (to be preserved) but also a reckless single-mindedness for "whitening" (to be disposed), the present is characterized by a progress in knowledge but not a progress in aging. The skin lightening industry both creates and responds to these concerns about temporality with products that offer desirable aspects of the past (e.g., bundled qualia of "light," "smooth" appearance) and future (e.g., technology), while avoiding undesirable aspects of the past (e.g., short-sightedness) and future (e.g., bundled qualia of "dark," "rough" aging).

In the third commercial, time is also made central when Aquino re-enacts her younger self in specified years: "1990," "1994," and "2010" (Figure 6). In 1990 when she started in "movies" (Figure 6, left) and in 1994 when she started in "TV" (Figure 6, middle), she was in front of the camera, pictured here-now as she was there-then: facing the camera, facing the viewer. In 2010 when she became "Queen of All Media" (as she is called and calls herself) (Figure 6, right), she sits in her "executive producer" chair no longer facing the camera but calling the shots behind it. Put another way, Aquino walks the viewer through historical time to consider her breakthrough in film in 1990 when her mother was president; her expansion into television in 1994 during the presidency of Fidel Ramos, who had served in her mother's cabinet; and her ascendency to Queen of All Media in 2010 when her brother was president.

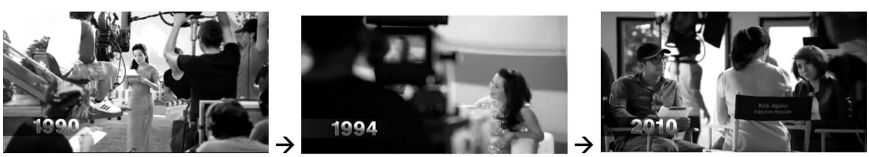

Figure 6. Aquino re-enactments.

This chronological narrative of professional mobility (from performer to producer, from actor to "queen," from one medium to "all media") constructs a parallel between Aquino's rise to power in the entertainment sphere and her family's rise to power in the political sphere. Establishing her intimacy and influence during the post-Marcos years of Philippine national development, the commercial frames Aquino's own progress in the industry as coinciding with, if not directly contributing to, the progress of the nation.

Across all three advertisements, the intimate here-and-now participation framework that both the spokesperson and viewer inhabit is organized by the central principle of time. Both spokesperson and viewer must contemplate how time matters: how thoughts, appearances, lives, and nations have changed or remained the same, how to feel about these realities, and how to manage and control them. In the semiotic and temporal organization of old photos and re-enacted scenes, qualia play a major role in value production as the commercials instruct the viewer to discard undesirable pasts (e.g., ignorance, autocracy) and undesirable futures (e.g., "darkness," "roughness") and embrace desirable pasts (e.g., "lightness," "smoothness") and desirable futures (e.g., technology, capitalism). In an immediate sense, the gendered consuming subject is invited to revise her concern with overt "whiteness" by pursuing "light" youthfulness as a means to control her life. In a larger sense, the gendered consuming subject is offered continued access to and maintenance of light modern juvenescence as a means to preserve status hierarchies and guide national narratives.

Conclusion

By attempting to make color changeable and age reversible, the skin lightening industry promises to dismantle the types of overdetermination that influence how its consumers are read as racialized, classed, gendered, and aging subjects. Yet as subjects are conceptualized as possessing the capacity to change, the racialized hierarchies and capitalist structures within which subjects move remain firmly intact. The ethnographic vignettes of Gemma and Nina that opened this piece speak to the reflexive awareness of—and sometimes participation in—this process.

The three commercials for Olay Total Effects establish an intimate participation framework in which concerns about the dark and aging body can be discussed. Relying on mestiza envy, these commercials not only market the possibility of light skin, but also bundle the qualia of "light" with "smooth" in opposition to "dark" and "rough," where the desire to whiten is almost overwhelmed by an equal, if not more pressing, desire to look young. Together with the Belo Men ads that opened this piece, the Olay ads rely on the semiotic establishment of temporal frames, insisting that time matters, whether in retaining youthful appearance or achieving social mobility. But whereas the Belo Men ads are taken to feature social-climbing

"fakes" as colonial subjects who desire whiteness, Olay ads are taken to feature mestiza celebrities as modern subjects who have moved beyond a shortsighted colonial desire for whiteness in order to retain their "real" youthful selves. "Whiteness" thus becomes reconceptualized: from index of racial Europeanness to index of modern juvenescence. For Olay, skin lightening is not about becoming fake—that is, becoming something you are not—but about remaining real—that is, fulfilling who you have always been. That Belo Men is a men's line of skin lighteners, products which are almost exclusively marketed to women, suggests that gender ideologies might also inform who is regarded as the "real" user of skin lightening products. As this article has demonstrated, skin only becomes "fake" when it co-occurs with a range of other perceived categories, whether it is gender, class, race, or other categories of social differentiation.

In the Olay ads, the racial and temporal organization of white-future-past as light modern juvenescence is no doubt in line with the global beauty industry's insistence on anti-aging as a priority for consumers. But for the Philippines, this temporality of the skin is also a temporality of the nation. The populist-nationalism that surged in the 1980s began the most recent and sharp movement away from the West, in terms of both bodily aspiration and economic reliance. The skin lightening industry's challenge became how to shift from a single-minded pursuit of whitening, while still profiting from the link between light skin and social status. The qualia of "light" and "smooth" became bundled together to suggest that a concern about how the skin and nation should lighten is overcome by a concern about how the skin and nation should mature. That is, both the skin and the nation became understood through similar moral imperatives: that their image must be managed and that their value must extend beyond whitening. Investing in the commodity—skin lightening or otherwise—means investing not only in the appearance of the skin but also in the appearance of the nation.

The figure of the mestiza—her bodily and linguistic hybridity (her light skin, her Taglish), her almost inseparability from the commodity, her position which both envies and is envied—still stands for a capitalist modernity invested in racial and class distinction. But her skin also enters into a semiotic and temporal system in which aging as a person and nation signals anxiety about a "dark" future and past that must be overcome. ■

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Foreign Language Translations:

Real Fake Skin: Semiotics of Skin Lightening in the Philippines
[**Keywords**: Skin lightening, semiotics, fake, Temporality, modernity, Philippines]

Pele Realmente Falsa: Semiótica do Embranquecimento da Pele nas Filipinas
[**Palavras-chave**: Embranquecimento da pele, semiótica, falso, temporalidade, modernidade, Filipinas]

Реальная фейк-кожа — Семиотика отбеливания кожи на Филиппинах
[**Ключевые слова**: отбеливание кожи, семиотика, фейк, темпоральность, современность, Филиппины]

真的假皮: 皮肤美白之符号学-以菲律宾为例
[**关键词**: 皮肤美白, 符号学, 赝品, 时间性, 现代性, 菲律宾]

الجلد المزيف الحقيقي: سيميائية تفتيح البشرة في الفلبين
كلمات البحث: تفتيح البشرة، السيميائيات، مزيف، الزمنية، الحداثة، الفلبين