

**ACAM Final Paper – Research Proposal**

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## **Filipino Representation in Media and Colonial Mentality among Second-Generation**

### **Filipino Immigrants in North America**

*“Most of us are expatriates right here in our own land. America is our heartland whether we get to go there or not.” – Conrado de Quiros*

The classic narrative of diaspora caught between two (or more) homelands is practically ubiquitous; but for the Filipino diaspora, this push and pull between nations is made all the more complicated by the nation’s colonial history and the psychological scars it has left behind that manifest themselves in contemporary Filipino culture. Following a history commonly referred to as “300 years in the convent, 50 years in Hollywood”, a nod to the 300 years of Spanish colonization and 50 years of American colonization (David, 2010), the Philippines emerged as a nation whose indigenous values had been robbed from them through what historian Vicente L. Rafael refers to as the “genocidal ferocity” of the ruling Western powers (Rafael, 2000). What resulted is a nation of peoples dreaming of the false promises of suburbia and American dollars, systematically severed through centuries of ethnocide from their cultural roots and yet tasked to build some semblance of a national identity from what scraps of Filipino culture the colonizers let live. For some Filipinos, a combination of changing immigration policies and the commodification of Filipino labor by the government over the last fifty years have allowed them to chase after the elusive land of milk and honey, and thus the North American Filipino population, now the second-largest Asian American group and fourth-largest Canadian immigrant group, swelled in size (Coloma et al., 2012). But the curious thing about Filipino diaspora is how these immigrants depart for a country that, mentally and culturally, they already belong to. Research by E. J. R. David and Kevin Nadal reveal how the overwhelming majority of immigrants preparing to leave the Philippines already live with cultural and social messages

encouraging conformity to North American culture and standards, suggesting that the acculturation process into American culture begins even before immigration through cultural messages and social sanctions already embedded in contemporary Filipino culture (David & Nadal, 2010). While the opening quote of this paper by nationalist writer Conrado de Quiros describes this pro-American mentality among Filipinos, it was only after studies by E. J. R David and Sumie Okazaki that this mentality would have a proper name: Colonial Mentality (CM) (David, 2013). CM represents the ultimate division from indigenous Filipino values: it is internalized oppression among Filipinos that is the direct consequence of colonization and leads to a rejection and perceived inferiority of Filipino-ness in preference for anything American, thus encouraging separation from Filipino culture (David, 2013). While it is inaccurate to assume that all Filipino diaspora carry internalized oppression, CM nonetheless propagates anti-Filipino sentiment within and among Filipinos through everyday interactions and culture (David, 2013). CM operates through many different mechanisms, but most studies to date have focused on the role of interpersonal interactions (eg. family, peers) and not media, which comprises a significant part of the Filipino cultural landscape.

**Research Question:**

To what extent do second-generation North American Filipino diaspora identify with media about Filipinos and how does this facilitate distance or proximity to their Filipino ethnic identities as measured by CM levels?

**Existing Research:**

Existing research on diaspora maintaining connections to heritage culture primarily looks at interpersonal factors such as family, peers, and community. What little literature does exist of Filipino diaspora's interpretation of Filipino representation in media largely pertains to

identifying major themes presented in media about Filipinos. Coloma et al. points out how representation of Filipinos in Canada is largely limited to a narrow list of tropes including domestic workers, nurses, and gangster youth (Coloma et al., 2010). They emphasize that while this suggests that Filipino representation is present, there is a hyper-visibility of these tropes that conceals the rich and diverse experiences of Filipino Canadians (Coloma et al., 2010). Any research into exactly how diaspora feel, interpret, or identify with this limited representation, however, is not mentioned.

Armand Gutierrez's 2020 study is one that involved a series of interviews with second-generation Filipino Americans and reveals major themes in media about Filipinos. Gutierrez notes that in American media, the Philippines is only ever brought up in the context of disaster, portraying the Philippines as a place of squalor and poverty in need of the care of America (Gutierrez, 2020). News from the Philippines, on the other hand, has more nuance to its coverage in that it provides more extensive social and historical context for the current events portrayed in the news, but continues to portray the Philippines as a place of corruption, disaster, and poverty in the eyes of diaspora (Gutierrez, 2020). As for non-news Filipino representation, Filipino media only appears to show off privileged Filipinos, typically of the half-Filipino half-white *mestiza/o* class, which diaspora believed did not portray an accurate picture of the Philippines (Gutierrez, 2020). Non-news Filipino representation in American media was not touched on in the interviews (Gutierrez, 2020). Overall, the findings of the study shows that portrayals of the Philippines, both within and outside of the Philippines, all represented the country in a bad light; but these findings were not connected to how diaspora then reflected these takeaways on themselves and their identities/desire to connect with the Philippines (Gutierrez, 2020). In addition, Gutierrez makes an important semantic distinction between media about Filipinos

based in the Philippines and media about Filipinos based in America and questions participants about both; but the differences in findings between the two could be greatly enriched by putting them in the context of the Philippines' colonial history that may implicate media for teaching pro-American and anti-Filipino sentiments to its audience and thus be more valuable in connecting media to how these immigrants integrate messages from media into their own identity-making.

### **Methodology:**

The present study will take a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative measures and will be conducted on second generation immigrants to gain an understanding of how diaspora without any baseline reference to the cultural environment of their heritage culture via experience understand their culture through indirect means. This study will look specifically at media.

The study will begin by utilizing E. J. R. David and Sumie Okazaki's Colonial Mentality scale (CMS) to measure colonial mentality among participants (David, 2013). The CMS tasks participants with rating their agreement on a scale of 1 (Strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) for 36 beliefs that would indicate possessing CM (eg. "I find persons with lighter skin-tones to be more attractive than persons with darker skin-tones." "I generally do not like newly-arrived Filipino immigrants. "). Higher CMS scores indicate stronger CM whereas lower CMS scores indicate lower CM.

The study will then conduct semi-structured interviews with Filipino diaspora asking questions targeted to identifying 1) diaspora's major takeaways about the representation of Filipinos in media about Filipinos/the Philippines ("What topics usually come up when media mentions/represents the Philippines/Filipinos?"), 2) where their media about the Philippines

comes from (“Where do you usually encounter media about Filipinos?”), 3) the extent to which diaspora validate or agree with these portrayals of Filipinos (“Do you believe that these are accurate portrayals of Filipino culture and Filipinos?”), and 4) the extent to which the diaspora identify with the major takeaways previously mentioned (“Do you relate with these portrayals of Filipinos in media?”).

### **Hypothesis**

Existing research suggests that media about Filipinos carries heavily negative messaging about the Philippines and Filipinos and would therefore be conducive to fostering the development of CM among its consumers. If diaspora report agreeing with the representation of Filipinos in media, and assuming that media about Filipinos is largely negative (in accordance with previous research findings), I expect this to result in a disincentive to connect with their heritage culture as marked by low reported identification with Filipinos represented in media and higher measures of CM.

### **Advancement of Knowledge and Value:**

Of special interest to this study is the presence of CM among second-generation immigrants, who are tasked with the challenge of building an ethnic identity often without any proper firsthand experience in the cultural environment of their heritage culture. Understanding how second-generation immigrants interpret and identify with the knowledge they gather about their heritage culture through second-hand sources (such as media) could signify just how pervasive CM is within Filipino culture in that it even extends beyond national boundaries. In addition, inquiring about whether these second-generation immigrants identify with the Filipinos represented in media can indicate the extent to which these immigrants have already disconnected with Filipino culture. This is especially relevant for Filipino immigrants in North

America, who have ‘made it’ to the ‘ultimate destination’ that Filipinos have been taught to aspire to, and may thus be incentivized to disconnect (Rafael, 2000). Therefore, understanding how Filipino diaspora in North America frame their relative privilege when confronted with media about Filipinos could thus be especially helpful to understanding CM. Especially considering the importance of heritage culture connections to the mental health of diaspora (Kim & Lee, 2011; Teppang et al., 2019), understanding factors that could interfere with a harmonious integration of heritage and host culture is of great importance.

Filipino diaspora rank exceptionally high on various rankings of mental health conditions. In a report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, adolescent Filipina Americans ranked above all other ethnic groups for prevalence of suicidal ideation at 45.6% (David & Nadal, 2010). Another study in 1993 by Kim & Chun found a 13.6% depression rate among Filipina American youths, topping the rates of depression among other Asian American groups (as cited in David & Nadal, 2010). Not only was CM found to be a closely linked to higher acculturative stress, lower ethnic identity development, self-esteem, among other poor mental health outcomes among immigrants, but for some conditions such as depression, CM was found to be a *better* predictor of poorer outcomes even when controlling for the effects of other variables that were also expected to influence depression in immigrants such as enculturation, ethnic identity, and personal and collective self-esteem (David, 2013). The effects are significant enough that David and Nadal have suggested incorporating CM-sensitive approaches in mental health supports for Filipino diaspora (David & Nadal, 2010). As such, understanding the mechanisms through which CM operates is heavily implicated with the mental health of Filipino diaspora. Thus, this study will explore the role of media about Filipinos – a factor that has been previously overlooked – in contributing to CM and, by extension, mental health.

Lastly, gathering information about how and where diaspora encounter and interact with media about Filipinos is also significant for taking a broader macrostructural approach to understanding the perpetuation of CM. For instance, as mentioned in Gutierrez's interviews with second-generation immigrants, Filipino representation in American news media is typically paired with messages that portray America as a do-gooder paternal figure aiding Filipinos through assistance and raising awareness. Connecting these major themes of "the Philippines as a place of poverty/disaster" with other major themes like "America as a paternalistic figure" can open opportunities to analyze how colonial attitudes continue to this day. It could also be of value to observe any relationships between CM and the sources of media.



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