

Decoding “The New Order”: Audience Interpretations of the 20th Philippine Advertising Congress Television Commercials

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This study looks at a series of television commercials that featured the Aetas, a Philippine indigenous group, which promoted the 20th Philippine Advertising Congress (PAC) and its theme “The New Order.” Employing Hall’s encoding/decoding model and Croteau and Hoynes’ model of media and the social world, this study sought to answer the question: Does cultural background play a role in shaping audience interpretations of mediated representations of indigenous peoples and other “othered” racial groups? Focus group discussions with “indigenous” and “non-indigenous” audiences suggest that along with cultural background, political affiliations and personal experiences with indigenous peoples are influential in decoding the representations of Aetas found in the PAC commercials. However, the finding that both audience groups decoded the commercials in a *negotiated* manner raises significant questions about the systems of knowledge upon which racial discrimination is founded.

Introduction

Clad in gray loincloths, small, slim, dark brown-skinned, and kinky black-haired Aetas appeared in three Philippine television commercials that featured them playfully dancing, somberly reflecting on their past encounters with American soldiers, and helping out an injured backpacker. Unlike previous commercials that featured the indigenous group distributed across Luzon islands, this series was not related to any development project or cultural festival; they were created to promote the 20th Philippine Advertising Congress (PAC) held in 2007 in the Subic Bay Freeport Zone – a land historically roamed and cultivated by the semi-nomadic Aetas.

According to PAC organizers, the winning advertising campaign successfully “utilized an icon that...would not only aid recall but unify [the] various elements” of the 20th PAC and its theme, “The New Order.” The icon is the Aeta who the advertisers predicted would “draw interest to the Subic event” (*The New Order Daily*, 2007, p. 5).

The advertising agency that conceptualized the commercials said Aetas were featured because they were directly related to the venue of the 20th PAC and indirectly relatable to the congress' theme, primarily by their history of cultural resilience. PAC (2007) noted that despite changes in their external environment, Aetas continue to lead lives similar to that of their ancestors:

Aetas have been consistently resisting change from other societies. The Aetas have learned to adapt and adjust to (and even benefit from) social, economic, cultural, and political challenges with their trademark resilience. In the process, they have molded their very own systems and structures within their culture while softening the impact of sudden change. (n.p.)

The Aetas' starring role in the PAC commercials presented a novel treatment of indigenous peoples and their culture in advertisement. However, considering advertising's history of racial misrepresentations (O'Barr, 1994, p. 17), it can be similarly argued that the commercials depended on stereotypical characteristics of "the native"—primitive, backward, and uncivilized; noble savages and eco-angels—to effectively communicate their message.

Moreover, when the commercials are scrutinized in light of the nuanced history and culture of the Aetas and other Philippine indigenous groups, it is of interest to understand how different television audiences interpret the commercials and what such interpretations suggest about how Aetas are viewed in Philippine society today. This paper aims to contribute to this understanding by gathering and analyzing interpretations of different audience groups. To do this, the interrelationship between race, culture, and mass media and its implications on actual social relations, are first considered.

Minorization in Mass Media

A survey of past representations of indigenous peoples (IPs) and racial minorities in mass media around the world yields a pessimistic view of media's ability or desire to venture outside hackneyed portrayals of "other" people" (O'Barr, 1994; Ungerleider, 1991; Wilson & Gutierrez, 1995; Wilson et al., 2003). An example in the Philippines is the media coverage of the aftermath of the 1991 Mt. Pinatubo explosion, when Aetas received unprecedented media exposure not only because their lives were uprooted and they were in dire need of financial and medical aid (Reilly, 2009, p. 64), but more so because they were subjects that highly intrigued media audiences (Shimizu, 2001). At the time, images of Aetas unable to use a can opener or converse in Filipino and begging

in towns and cities were heavily circulated by Philippine media, drawing close attention to their physical and cultural “otherness” (Pasimio, 1995; Shimizu, 2001; Shimizu, 2003, p. 193).

Critical scholars caution that media messages like news stories, television sitcoms, commercials, and advertisements that carry representations of these “othered” peoples are a means for mass media to reinforce racial ideologies that pervade modern societies (Frith, 1995; Jhally & Lewis, 1995). Emphasizing their exoticism and aesthetic anomaly serves to enhance dominant beliefs about beauty and normalcy, and correspondingly, sustain societal marginalization of indigenous peoples or ethnic minority groups (Croteau & Hoynes, 2003, p. 281).

This understanding of the power of mass media to not merely reflect but affect social realities through its representations can be traced back to Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony: the mass media, as a crucial part of civil society, function to establish and maintain the “domination by ideas and cultural forms that induce consent to the rule of the leading groups in a society” (Kellner, 1997, p. 3). They exist as an important institution to maintain the prevailing social order by instilling among people specific values and beliefs (about class, race, gender) that discourage social deviance and reify social conformity (Croteau & Hoynes, 2003, p. 166). This prompted the promotion of sustained and critical appraisal of mass media as a socializing institution that not only legitimates but naturalizes dominant ideologies.

In terms of the minorization of IPs in media and advertising, population figures and collective consuming power are both considered. After all, media and advertisers do not only favor the many but also the rich and influential (Jhally, 1987; Wilson et al., 2003, p. 139). It is therefore not surprising that mass media either ignore or very rarely talk about the stories and issues of IPs and other minorities.

Following Gramsci, this observation has led to the position that the minorization of IPs in media is *dialectically* an effect of their minority status and a cause of their further marginalization in society. Hence, a study on media misrepresentations should also be a study on social marginalization precisely because one might not exist without the persistence of the other. It is thus crucial to examine the PAC commercials as culturally relevant signs and symbols that possibly abet misrepresentations of Aetas and other IPs in Philippine society. Notably, out of 90 million people in the Philippines, there are around 12 million IPs distributed among 110 major ethno-linguistic groups (National Commission on Indigenous Peoples [NCIP], 2001; Ting et al., 2008, p. 78). The distinct culture of each group scattered in different regions has led to the classification of Philippine society as one of the most multicultural in Asia.

Literature Review

Gandy (1998, p. 158) pointed out that mass media “bear some responsibility for the social construction of the realities in which we pursue our day-to-day existence.” Ideally, then, media should be evaluated in terms of the accuracy of their representations of “other” people—that is, people whom audiences may not encounter on a regular basis—and how such representations impact the lives of individuals and groups in societies. This echoes what Croteau and Hoynes (2003, p. 15) and Wilson and others (2003, p. 36) emphasized in their discussion of media’s role in socialization: media supply us with knowledge about things, people, and places we cannot yet directly experience. Gandy further noted that media messages like advertisements which were “produced for one segment of the population have historically made liberal use of stereotyped representations of others outside the target market” (p. 186).

Meanwhile, Van Dijk (1993, 1995, 2002), who has done extensive work on the role of discourse in producing and reproducing “white, or Western group dominance,” called attention to the underlying ethnic and racial prejudices found in everyday “text and talk”—daily conversations, parliamentary proceedings, textbooks, and of course, media messages. He expounded that such communicated racial prejudices are central “especially in contemporary information and communication societies, polity, society, and culture, and hence also in their mechanisms of continuity and reproduction, including those of racism” (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 95). In this day and age when people heavily rely on mass media to provide information, any semblance of racism they communicate will inevitably create an impact, big or small, positive or otherwise.

Owing to the changing nature of today’s predominantly corporately run mass media, it is said that the role of media in society, specifically in terms of the representing people and events, has been modified for good. Largely funded by major advertisers, contemporary media institutions are less inclined to be conscious of the social representations they promote (Jhally, 1987).

In this climate it has been argued that advertisers have exceeded their roles as mere sponsors or media partners to become media producers themselves: they have gained control over the content and distribution of media programs, including the social representations embedded in them (Gandy, 1998, p. 100). Advertisers who fund media have the means to put into effect “consequences for the structure of racialized beliefs that flow from repeated exposure” to advertisements (Gandy, p. 158). For this reason, Frith (1995) stated that advertisements are more than marketing tools: they are “cultural artifacts” and must be critically studied as such.

Racism and Representations of Cultural Minorities in Philippine Media

In the Philippines, the overall representation of IPs in media follows what has been observed in other multicultural countries (Atwood & McAnany, 1986; Elkin, 1973; Entman, 1992; Kemper, 2001; Mazzarella, 2003; Sengupta & Frith, 1997; Wilson & Gutierrez, 1995; Wilson et al., 2003; Li & Shooshtari, 2007). According to Lent (1986), Gloria Feliciano's 1966 study was the first scholarly take on mediated representations of the Filipino *katutubo* ("native" in the Filipino language). After analyzing the content of six Philippine dailies, Feliciano found that minorities were portrayed as "fierce, lawless and helpless, headhunters, decapitated"—keywords that echoed the ascriptions that American colonizers imposed on the Filipino natives at the turn of the 20th century (Vergara, 1995).

Directly related to this period in history, Vaughan's (1996) article on the Igorots, an indigenous tribe in the Cordillera region, northern Philippines, exhibited at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair in Missouri, USA, recalled what could have been the earliest documented display of Filipino natives outside the Philippines. On the subject of the World Fair, Vergara (1995) discussed how the portrayals of Filipino natives in the event, as seen in preserved photographs, aimed to legitimate the colonial agenda of the Americans. This brings to light the origin or historical roots of most mediated representations of "other" races: to justify colonial or imperial projects of powerful countries like the US, in consonance with the "white man's burden."

There is a noted dearth of local studies on representations of IPs in Philippine mass media. For those that exist (Pasimio, 1995; Bautista et al., 2006), racist or discriminatory interpretations among media viewers, which the researchers projected were due to media misrepresentations, were not further discussed in relation to social realities, particularly the persistence of racial discrimination. This, according to Van Dijk (2002, p.145), is a common oversight: studies that deal with "racism" in mass media often fail to consider that racism is "a complex societal system of ethnically or 'racially' based domination" that is learned through discourse, including those presented by mass media. Jhally and Lewis (1995) similarly observed that racism has often been inadequately understood as mere concurrence with negative images of other races. Resultantly, there are few studies on racial representations that look beyond images or representations into the existing social structures that allow racist portrayals in the media to retain validity in the eyes of the public or the colonial roots of racist typecasting.

This shortcoming, among others, underscores the need for communication research to systematically and critically analyze how mass media represent IPs and other “othered” races. While related efforts from anthropology and cultural studies exist, they may not be enough to sustain keen public interest on the subject, especially relative to the growing bulk of market and advertising research that support the appropriation of indigenous cultures to locally promote international brands and products (i.e., glocalization), often regardless of social consequences.

Study Framework

This study is guided by the critical media studies of Hall (1980), Becker (1984), Morley (1992), and Ang (1991). The analytical framework incorporates Hall’s encoding/decoding model for mass communication with the simplified model of media and the social world by Croteau and Hoynes (2003, p. 25). The latter establishes that mass communication is a complex and unending cycle involving the sender, receiver, message, and medium (as components that cannot be separated from the social world they are based in), while the former focuses on the linear reception process between media message *encoders* and *decoders*, and specifically addresses how audiences decode messages that carry pre-encoded ideologies. Both models are rooted in the critical paradigm of communication research wherein theories maintain that mass media, as ideological tools wielded by the dominant social groups, consciously produce and circulate images and representations supportive of the current social order (Littlejohn & Foss, 2007). Under this paradigm, audiences are deemed active but in need of empowerment to reject media-purveyed ideologies that may not be compatible with their own cultural values and beliefs (Nightingale, 1996, pp. 12-13).

Figure 1 presents the integrated model and this study’s framework. A circle is used to underscore the continuous nature of mass communication. The four intersecting double arrows, which enclose the “social world,” present the interactions between the message, technology, production, and reception. The influential role of an audience member’s cultural background in determining the kind of decoding she or he will make for any media message is also incorporated. This reflects how Hall saw media messages as communication vehicles of the dominant culture, and as such, are always politicized and problematized (Nightingale, 1992, p. 22).

There are three kinds of hypothetical decoding positions for different groups of audience: 1) a *dominant* or *preferred* reading results when audience members decode exactly what the producers or encoders wished to impart; 2) a

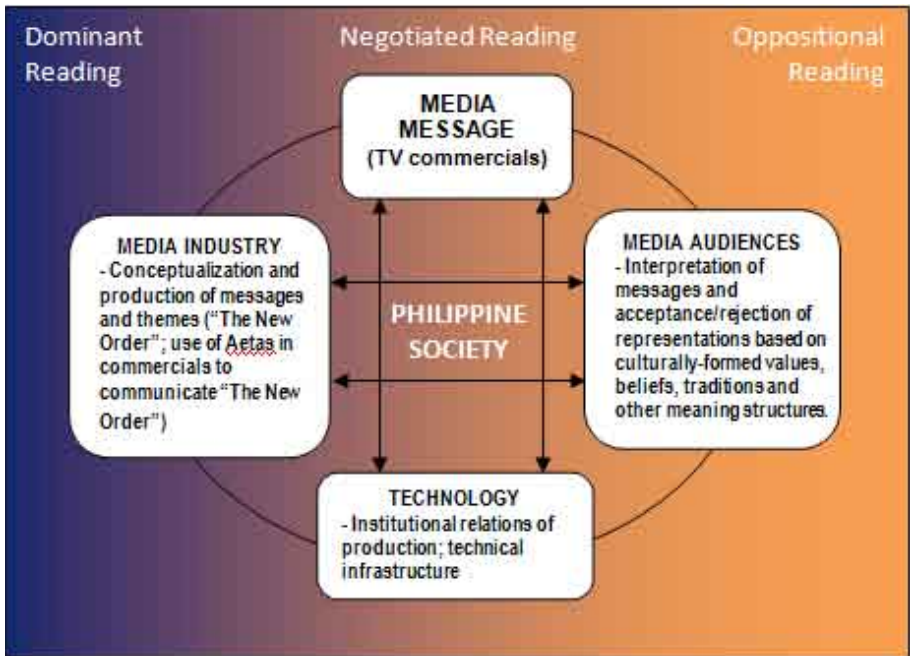


Figure 1. Framework of the study

negotiated reading is fulfilled when audiences accept the dominant definitions of the general concepts of the message but situate them in their own local experiences, which may be totally unrelated to what the encoders intended; and 3) an *oppositional* reading occurs when audiences interpret a media message using frameworks of understanding that totally diverge from what the encoders originally desired (Hall, 1980, 1992; Nightingale, 1996, pp. 21-39). These decoding positions are reflected in the framework to analyze audience interpretations of racial representations in the 20th PAC.

Methodology

This study involved four focus group discussions (FGDs) with two sets of young audiences: non-Aeta IP and non-IP. Young audiences were chosen mainly because, according to the 2003 Functional Literacy and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS), members of the young age group (herein limited to 18 to 25 years old) watch more television and are thus exposed to more television commercials than their older counterparts. Based on Hall's (1980) three hypothetical reading positions, audience interpretations were classified as dominant, negotiated, or oppositional and compared, according to groups, with each other.

The distinction between two audience groups was made considering cultural background as an independent variable of the study. Following Nightingale (1996, p. 43), such distinction would also allow audience members from similar groups—for example, women or young Asian people—to speak without fear of conflict from people belonging to other groups, without prejudice to disagreements that exist within groups. Given the topic of the FGDs, audiences who identify or do not identify as members of another indigenous group (e.g., Muslim or Igorot) are free to talk in terms of “we” and “them,” if they feel the need to. Such explicit terms of self-identification, if they emerge, are important aspects of this study.

Invitations to join the FGD were posted on the main bulletin boards of the University of the Philippines’ Office of Student Affairs in the Diliman, Quezon City campus and of the University Student Council in the Baguio City campus. Those who signed up were contacted by the researcher to schedule the FGD. Before starting the FGD, the three television commercials were shown twice to all participants, including those who have already seen them. They were free to ask for the commercials to be shown again at any time during the FGD, if they needed to refresh their memories. The FGDs, which ran for an average of 75 minutes, were conducted in English, Filipino, and Ilocano, according to the language the participants were most comfortable with.

Findings and Discussion

Does cultural community affiliation greatly affect audience decoding or do other factors have a more significant influence?

To answer this, two types of FGDs—for “indigenous” and “non-indigenous” audiences—involving four groups were held. A total of 11 people participated in two “non-indigenous” audience FGDs, while 12 joined two non-Aeta “indigenous” audience FGDs. All participants were university students. For the indigenous group, 10 participants identified themselves as *Igorot*, while two identified themselves as *Ibanag*. Among the non-indigenous group participants, not one was identified as belonging to an indigenous group. Participants were asked questions about their understanding of each commercial, the role of Aetas in the commercials, and of the advertising industry’s practices in terms of representing cultural minorities.

Non-indigenous Persons: Political over Cultural?

The participants were noticeably divided on most questions, particularly those involving advertising and the advertising industry. The responses varied according to the participants’ current academic endeavor, as identified by the

degree program they were enrolled in. This is consistent with the study framework: since all participants were still studying and all except one claimed not to have any firsthand experience in communicating with Aetas, their knowledge of Aetas was based on secondhand sources, such as books and mass media (Hall, 1980, p. 60). For example, divergent reactions about the commercials from a Business major and a Humanities student are found below:

The commercials basically showed stereotypes of the Aetas. Why Aetas? Maybe because the event is in Subic. As for “Algorithm,” even though the representation was not natural, it made sense: if advertising before had one order, now it has a “new” order. It’s clever. The “savage” portrayal was made comic. (Nikolai, M, 19, Business major)

[The commercials] remind me of Benito Vergara’s book *Displaying Filipinos, kaso ‘yung tiga-North ‘yung fineature*, shows that same representation from 1900s still exist in 2007. *Ganun pa rin ‘yung pino*-portray sa mga katutubo....*Pinakita ang “exotic” way of living na ‘di naman dapat kasi ‘yung way of life ng Ayta ay hindi naman exotic.* (The commercials remind me of Benito Vergara’s book, *Displaying Filipinos*, although that featured groups from Northern Philippines. This shows that the same representations in the 1900s exist in 2007. Indigenous peoples are still portrayed in the same way....The Aeta’s “exotic” way of living was shown in the commercials, which shouldn’t be the case because the Aeta’s way of life is not exotic in the first place; Rose, F, 20, Humanities graduate student)

For topics where specific educational background did not play a major factor in the responses, participants drew from either their past experiences with Aetas or their current engagements as, for example, part of a human rights organization. Participants affiliated with political organizations and alliances held views regarding mass media (i.e., as an instrument of the ruling class to maintain the status quo) and the Aetas’ status in society (deliberately marginalized) that drew from their group’s stated beliefs or principles, or both. This stood in contrast with those who were not politically organized and who more or less relied on information obtained from mass media (television documentaries, news stories, etc.) or interactions in various learning institutions and in their homes to answer the same questions. Below are statements from one who grew up in a province where Aetas also live and another whose knowledge of Aetas comes from school and television:

Ako naman, bilang galing sa Zambales kung saan maraming Ayta at lagi-lagi ko sila nakikita mula pagkabata, sa tingin ko unrealistic ‘yung portrayal sa ads, lalo na sa “Algorithm.” ‘Yung una, naipakita na mara-mi talagang alam ang mga Ayta sa halamang gamot. At sa pangalawa, totoo din na maraming Amerikano sa Subic noon. (As someone who grew up in Zambales, where there are many Aetas whom I often saw as a kid, I think their portrayal in the ads is unrealistic, especially in “Algorithm.” The first one showed how knowledgeable Aetas really are in herbal medicine. In the second, it is also true that there many Americans in Subic; Cho, 21, F)

*Sila ‘yung namamalimos. Napaalis dahil sa Pinatubo explosion. Mga walang trabaho at di nakapag-aral....*From a POV of one who grew up in the city *at bilang future social science teacher, ang IPs ay hindi tinuturing na aktwal na tao. Hina-highlight ‘yung nomadic cultures nila (at) hiwalay pa rin sa kabuuang Pilipino na taga-lowlands.* (They’re beggars [who were] displaced by the Mt. Pinatubo explosion, unemployed and uneducated....From a point of view of one who grew up in the city and as a future social science teacher, IPs are not treated as actual people. Their nomadic cultures are highlighted and they are still separate from the rest of the Filipinos who are from the lowlands; Joy, 20, F, B Secondary Education)

Most participants understood the concept of “The New Order” as it was delivered in the commercials, including the accompanying “exoticism” and stereotypical portrayals (noble savages, backward, uncivilized) of the Aetas. They expressed that these were “more of the same” things they learned in schools and still see on television. Although they recognized that such portrayals are patently false, they acceded that the overriding consideration in analyzing the commercials was the objective of the advertisers—to promote the 20th PAC in Subic.

Notably, two participants offered the most oppositional reading of the commercials: one grew up in the province of Zambales, where many Aetas also live, and the other has long been affiliated with a national political organization. These participants had the most critical voices in the two FGDs. They refused to concede that the advertisers’ original intentions should be taken into account when evaluating the commercials’ portrayal of the Aetas. Similar to what Li and Shooshtari (2007) found in China, they said that not even creativity’s sake could excuse the advertisers’ deliberate misuse of indigenous culture and its accompanying symbols to promote their ideas.

Finally, not one participant expressed hope that advertisers can be more “careful” in representing “other” races. Others believed that advertising, as an industry and a profession, should not be hindered by ethical considerations because there is a greater risk that these will obstruct “artistic freedom.” They further claimed that the “fight” against all forms of racial discrimination cannot come from reforming institutional practices of mass media. They reiterated that racial discrimination is something rooted in the unequal power relations in society and requires a more massive social movement to be satisfactorily addressed.

Non-Aeta Indigenous Persons: Culture as Central

Participants in this group established a consensus on almost all points. They all agreed that Aetas, as “*kapwa katutubo*” (fellow IPs), were only featured in the commercials because the 20th PAC was held in Subic. They also agreed that the manner by which the Aetas were represented is another “classic example” of mass media irresponsibly using indigenous culture to promote their own products and ideas.

May consensus naman 'ata dito na hindi ito empowering for Aetas kasi bilang IPs alam natin na hindi ito ang tamang paraan para mapansin.
(I think there is a consensus here that [the commercials] are not empowering for Aetas because as IPs we know that this is not the right way to get noticed; Ice, 20, Ibanag)

Participants found the theme “The New Order,” as shown in the three commercials, difficult to understand or relate to. They questioned the tagline “unfamiliar territory” as something biased for outsiders or non-IPs, which is to say the territory is *not* unfamiliar to the Aetas but it is to non-Aetas. Consistent with the study framework, participants primarily drew from their own personal experiences growing up in indigenous communities to answer questions. They attributed their responses to their “initial learning” as fellow members of indigenous tribes and to personal experiences of racial discrimination inside and outside school. They also recalled past commercials, television shows, and other mass media messages that for them typecast IPs.

One participant identified “in-group bias,” a psychological concept that explains why and how members of a same group give preferential treatment to fellow members, to explain the group’s reactions against the portrayals of Aetas in the commercials.

Kakaiba yung pag-star [ng mga Aya]. Pero kapag naging Igorot 'yung mga starring baka mas magagalit ako at hindi matutuwa. Parang in-group bias: mas magagalit ka kasi kasama ka doon, ikaw 'yung pina-palabas. (The Aeta's role was unique. But if it were the Igorots who were starring, I might be angrier or I won't find them as funny. As in an in-group bias, you tend to get angrier since you're part of the group and it is you being shown; Nel, 20, F, Ibanag)

Perhaps ironically, it is this same in-group bias among dominant racial groups that scholars like Van Dijk (1993) attribute to the persistence of racial discrimination in society. In this instance, however, the participants invoked the concept to explain their almost immediate dislike for the three commercials given how, to their minds, the Aetas and their culture were misrepresented.

A main concern raised by the Igorot and Ibanag youth was related to how non-IPs would accept, accommodate, or interpret the commercials. Having directly or indirectly experienced racial discrimination themselves, they expressed frustration at how the same stereotypes of IPs exist in mass media today. For them, struggling against discrimination in "regular" activities is difficult enough without mass media circulating false notions about indigenous ways of life, like remaining as hunters and gatherers, to the general public.

As for how media can aid the IPs' struggle against cultural marginalization and racial discrimination, the participants conveyed optimism. For all of them, it is possible, but media should include and highlight other issues IPs in the Philippines face, such as illegal logging and destructive mining on indigenous lands. They should not simply focus on "identity politics" or concerns revolving around pride of heritage. According to them, the latter has been the usual practice of mass media:

The ads raise awareness about Aetas and their presence in Subic, *pero hanggang presence lang....Sa issues nila, walang nabanggit at 'di napag-usapan. Parang 'yung kay Marky Cielo': grabe 'yung exposure about Igorots pero hanggang identity issues lang—'yung tungkol sa pride sa pagiging Igorot.* (The ads raise awareness about Aetas and their presence in Subic, but only on their presence....As for the issues they face, nothing is mentioned or talked about. Just like what happened with Marky Cielo: the exposure about Igorots was there but it was all about identity issues – all about pride in being an Igorot; Francis, 18, M, Bon-tok)

The Outcome: Dominant-Negotiated-Oppositional

It remains difficult to neatly classify, according to Hall's three positions, both audience groups' readings of the commercials vis-à-vis producers' encoded messages, as Morley (1992) noted in his study. For this study, audience decoding ranged from *dominant* to *negotiated* (for the non-indigenous youth) and *negotiated* to *oppositional* (for the non-Aeta indigenous youth). If Hall's audience decoding positions were shown as a continuum, the findings of this study would be represented as Figure 2.

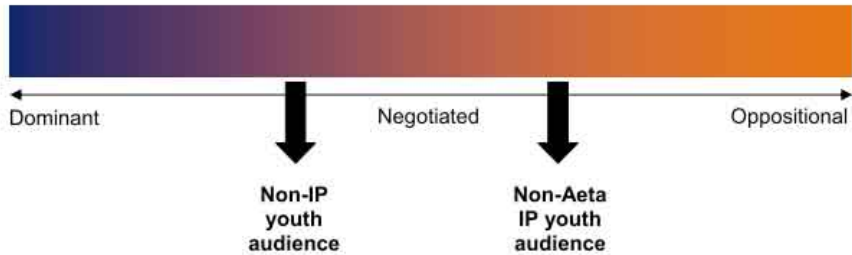


Figure 2. Continuous representation of Hall's audience decoding positions

However, according to this study's framework, the readings of non-indigenous audiences and Igorot/Ibanag audiences would both be classified as *negotiated*—they broadly accepted the advertisers' definitions of general concepts but still situated these in their past experiences and current social and academic engagements, producing meanings that were not directly related to what the producers intended.

Conclusions and Implications

In analyzing audience interpretations of the commercials, educational background, personal encounters with indigenous groups, and political affiliations mattered more for those who are not affiliated with any cultural community. On the other hand, audiences affiliated with a cultural community principally drew from their own experiences as cultural minorities. Yet, despite these differences, the framework provides that both audience groups decoded the 20th PAC commercials in a *negotiated* manner.

This raises a theoretical and practical concern that needs to be threshed out: either the decoding of non-indigenous youth and non-Aeta indigenous youth of the 20th PAC commercials did not actually distinctly diverge, or there is a slight but inherent weakness in Hall's three audience decoding positions, or possibly both. While the two audience groups may be classified as the “non-Aeta audience” to illustrate their similarly negotiated interpretations of the

commercials, such a conceptual merger would fail to account for the specific reasons and nuances behind their respective interpretations. Moreover, it contradicts the study's finding that audiences' cultural community affiliation *does* impact on their decoding of mediated racial representations. This is crucial to note for further studies related to this topic or to those that aim to challenge the assumption of Hall's encoding/decoding model, especially as it applies to multicultural societies like the Philippines.

From the perspective of cultural and postcolonial studies, this finding could further serve as a basis to explore and re-examine historical complexities of the systems of knowledge upon which racism is founded, following important insights on the politics of representation and language drawn from Edward Said (1978), Julia Kristeva (1980), and Gayatri Spivak (2010).

Finally, following audience interpretations, particularly of the "indigenous" group, the commercials' adaptation and, arguably, re-interpretation of Aetas' history and culture to promote the "The New Order" may be deemed consistent with a "textbook advertising" technique, which involves using parts of a generally known culture, preferably one that can immediately establish familiarity, to communicate by association what one wants to communicate (De Mooij, 2005). This was done by highlighting the Aetas' famous traits of living off the forest and resisting external pressures on their cultural environment, while neglecting other problems Aetas face such as cultural marginalization and racial discrimination.

Recommendations

The glaring absence of Aetas as participants in this study needs to be addressed by future related endeavors. If consistent with the study framework, Aetas offered a reading distinct from the two other groups their input could enrich the abovementioned theoretical issues. Thus, it remains a strong recommendation for future studies to prioritize the participation of the very indigenous group featured in media messages. After all, it can be argued that the "othering" of Aetas in the commercials is simply extended by this study's very exclusion (or at least, non-inclusion) of them.

With respect to challenging the role of media in reproducing racial and ethnic prejudice in society, campaigning for advertising agencies and media corporations to represent IPs or cultural minorities in a fair and truthful manner, while worthwhile, ought to be supplemented by other actions. Otherwise, it grants media the power to radically change ideologies that have been learned and sustained in civil society (in the Gramscian sense); it gives media a power it may not necessarily possess. Indubitably, mass media *may* function to

reproduce racial or ethnic prejudice by propagating discriminatory images and incidentally encouraging racism as behaviour among audience groups. Racism, in this sense, means actively engaging in a sustained discourse about race with the ultimate purpose of proving the definite superiority of one race over all the others—a conscious and expressed intolerance for racial and cultural diversity.

These understandings of media's power and social responsibility should be further studied and popularized by scholars and IPs, who would be able articulate these in their own words, and distributed to media decision makers who can ensure fair representation of IPs in their programs. Emerging "indigenous productions" consisting of short and feature-length films conceptualized and produced by indigenous media groups could also be looked into as a model for socially responsive media.

Ultimately, however, all efforts should be part of broader initiatives that aim to address the root causes of racism by directly looking into the social conditions that allow it to persist until today.

Endnotes

- 1 A young actor of Igorot descent found dead by his mother in their Quezon City home in December 2008. He was buried in his family's backyard in the Mountain Province according to traditional Ibaloi custom.

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