

WHITE GEOPOLITICS OF NEO-COLONIAL BENEVOLENCE: THE AUSTRALIA-PHILIPPINE 'PARTNERSHIP'

ELAINE LAFORTEZA

Abstract

This paper tracks the processes through which Australia is constituted as an authoritative regional power within the Asia-Pacific, and in concurrence, how Australian peoples are cited as benevolent 'neighbours' in relation to the Philippines and Filipinos. I focus on two bilateral projects: the General Agreement on Development Cooperation (GADC) and *The Philippines: Beyond the Crisis* study. Through this focus, I investigate the triumphalist narrativising of the Australian nation/self that shifts the focus from neo-colonising initiatives to a celebration of Australianness. This paper thus seeks to expose the underbelly of conspicuous compassion that governmental tracts deploy.

I concentrate on three interrelated aspects of racialisation: the projection of a "White Man's burden" as a role of neo-colonial benevolence; Orientalism as a producer and a product of a "White Man's burden", and racial performativity, wherein I implicate Australia's bilateral relations with the Philippines as (re)negotiating agency/authority through the performative enactment of (national, regional and self) identity for Australians and Filipinos. In doing so, transborder colonial permutations of Australian and Philippine imperialism can be made to answer for the reconfiguring of zones of inclusion and exclusion in relation to the making of the Philippine-Australia nexus.

Introduction

While on the one hand, the Australian government talks about being a "good neighbour" and bringing stability to the region, it is not adequately addressing the negative impacts these companies can have (Oxfam Australia 2003).

The above quote refers to the impact of Australian mining companies in the Philippines and the Australian Government's inadequate response to the negative impacts that occur contrary to their blatant declarations of being a "good neighbour". Although this paper is not explicitly about Australian mining companies in the Philippines, it does track some bilateral negotiations that exist between Australia and the Philippines. This paper also investigates the means through which governmental initiatives 'speak'/narrativise Australia as an authoritative regional power within the Asia-Pacific, and in concurrence, routinely cite (white) Australians as benevolent 'neighbours' in relation to Filipinos and the Philippines. For this, I focus on two events which are taken from the booklet *Philippines-Australia Relations* issued by the Embassy of the Philippines in Canberra (2005). This booklet tracks key aspects of the Australian-Philippine relationship since the late 1950s until 21 February 2005. Although this time frame involved a multitude of events, economic relations are the predominant features of the booklet. Consequently, the view that an Australian-Philippine partnership is chiefly premised on economy is promoted.

The events I focus on include the signing of the General Agreement on Development Cooperation (GADC) by the two countries. On 28 October 1994, both countries formalised bilateral development cooperation by signing the GADC. It was registered and recorded with the United Nations in 1998 by Romulo Roberto R. (Foreign Secretary, Philippines, 1996-2001) and Gordon Bilney, who in 1994 was the Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs, Australia.¹ "As an umbrella agreement, the GADC covers all development cooperation activities and provides general conditions for assistance" (Philippine Embassy, Canberra Australia 2005: 11). Another event I focus on began on 4 May 1998 when Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer launched a study commissioned by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) entitled *The Philippines: Beyond the Crisis* (1998a). According to Downer, this was launched "to make more visible the extent to which Australia and the Philippines are actively engaged with each other" (1998: 3). Although I situate this analysis within a bounded historical time frame, I do not mean to state that the racialising practices deployed through the GADC and *The Philippines: Beyond the Crisis* study remain unique to Australia during the 1990s. Rather, these tracts are part of broader, complex, socio-cultural imperatives that constitute Australia's *naturalised* role of benevolence in relation to the Philippines and to the broader Asia-Pacific region.

These political developments progressed through an interesting shift in the representation of the Australian Government's engagements with Asia. John Howard's 1996 election win was helped by distancing the Howard Government from Paul Keating's strategies of connecting with Asia and 'distancing' Australia from Britain

through calls for a republic (Camilleri 2004). This is not to state that Keating's politics could dissolve tensions regarding Asia/Asians/Asian-Australians and their place in Australia or that Keating envisioned Australia as an 'Asian' nation. For instance, "[in] a speech to the Indonesian Foreign Policy Forum on 22 April 1992, entitled *Our Common Interest*, he described Australia as a 'European country living alongside Asia'" (cited in Stratton 1998: 194). Further, Keating's attempts to connect with Asia does not mean that Howard himself does not also seek to strengthen ties with Asian governments, as can be evidenced through the recent agreement signed by Howard and Japan's Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe to "strengthen military ties between the two nations" (Coorey 2007: 1). Yet, the public personas of each politician spoke for different things. Keating's politics threatened the normative boundaries that structured Australian society and culture while Howard was seen to restore these boundaries and norms. The GADC and *The Philippines: Beyond the Crisis* study constitute both positions. Although they purport to strengthen the bilateral relationship between the Philippines and Australia, specific racialising practices are employed to maintain Manichean distinctions between the nations.

I focus on three interrelated aspects of racialisation deployed by these governmental initiatives. The first is the projection of a conceptual and literal "White Man's burden" as a (white) Australian role of colonial benevolence. In keeping with the views deployed by academics such as Winthrop D. Jordan (1974), Stephen A. Marglin (2003) and Damien W. Riggs (2004a), I track the imperialistic implications embedded in thoughts and practices that deploy a "white (man's) burden" as the

obligation to 'colonise' and 'civilise' non-white people. Riggs states that:

[The construction of the] 'white person's burden'... [has served as] an ongoing process of management aimed at constructing a foundational claim for white sovereignty (Riggs 2004a).

Therefore, the act of managing 'non-whiteness' by white people secures an authoritative white ontology of being and belonging in the world. Here, I do not state that those consigned as white belong to a homogenous group that uniformly take up a "White Man's burden". Whiteness involves differences in ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, sexuality, religion and so on. Thus, it cannot be said that 'white' people embody the "White Man's burden" for all times. However, I argue that Australia's bilateral economic relations with the Philippines evoke a logic of the "White Man's burden". Further, I argue that Orientalism is a producer and a product of a "White Man's burden". I argue that the Philippines functions as part of Australia's Orient. I also discuss an Orientalist "White Man's burden" as a performative practice, and thus implicate racial performativity as a constitutive racialising initiative deployed by governmental strategies. Thus, I argue that Australia's bilateral economic relations with the Philippines (re)negotiates agency and geopolitical status through the performative enactment of national, regional and self identity.

White Burden

Take up the White Man's burden--
Send forth the best ye breed--
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild--
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,

Half-devil and half-child. Take up the
White Man's burden--
In patience to abide,
To veil the threat of terror
And check the show of pride;
By open speech and simple,
An hundred times made plain
To seek another's profit,
And work another's gain...(Kipling
1899: 215-216).

By the "White Man's burden", I refer to Kipling's concept of the *dutiful* giving of services by a western power to aid the "less fortunate", or in Kipling's terms, to "serve your captive's need" (Kipling 1899: 215). I draw on Kipling's use of "white burden" to argue that whiteness within developmental initiatives between Australia and the Philippines works as a strategic geo-political negotiation between a western 'First World' space and a 'non-western' 'Third World' area, such as the Philippines. Such negotiation uses whiteness to signify a specific bodily being with a specific skin-colour and western geo-political specificity imbued with certain norms and characteristics, such as the characteristic of being a revered donor and helper, as will be tracked later in this paper.

Further, although Kipling refers to the white man as the purveyor of power, knowledge and benevolence in relations with non-white others, I do not wish to dismiss the role of white women in continuing colonial racialising imperatives.² Therefore, throughout this analysis I argue that Australia is not positioned in the exact terms that Kipling prescribes. Rather, it is through acts of good neighbouring that Australia positions itself as taking up a "White burden". In this context, unequal relations of power are inscribed within Australia's enactment of White burden onto the corpus of the Philippine nation. For instance, the word "captives" in Kipling's poem employs an imperial

Orientalist language whose imagery of expansion and annexation occurs through domination. This imperialist discourse positions Australia as an authoritative 'master' that has the resources and the *innate* benevolent character to work for the profit of others: "To seek another's profit—And work another's gain" (Kipling 1899: 216). In this context, unequal relations occur in terms of benevolent colonialism which entails blatant declarations of the colonial power's disposition to give generous 'gifts' to non-white individuals.

Such conspicuous philanthropy is reiterated by the goals set out by the GADC. These goals seek to facilitate diplomatic relations between Australia and the Philippines, as well as to ensure that regional projects for economic re-structure will occur under the guidelines stated by the goals. Five out of these eight goals focus on the distribution of Australian aid to the Philippines. These goals are "(1) the sending of missions to the Philippines to study and analyze opportunities for Australian assistance; (2) the granting of scholarships to nationals of the Republic of the Philippines for studies and professional training in Australia, the Philippines or a third country; (3) the assignment of Australian experts, advisers and other specialists to the Philippines; (4) the provision of equipment, materials, goods and services required for the successful execution of development projects in the Philippines; (5) the development and carrying out of collaborative research, studies and projects designed to contribute to the attainment of the objectives of this Agreement" (DFAT 1998b).

The other three goals insinuate that Australia continues to be the benevolent benefactor. Yet, there are ambiguities in these proposals which imply that Australia could be helped by the

Philippines. These proposals are: "(6) the encouragement and promotion of relations between firms, institutions and persons of the two countries; (7) promotion of sound development of trade and industry; and (8) any other form of assistance, reportable as official development assistance (ODA) under the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) guidelines as may be determined by the two Governments" (DFAT 1998b). In these proposals, Australia is not blatantly named as a recipient of Philippine aid. Conversely, the Philippines is repeatedly pronounced as requiring Australian help. Both nations are consolidated into a pattern of colonial benevolence wherein the white western power (Australia) 'saves' the Philippines from socio-economic depression. The GADC intimates that the Philippines embodies the role of needing *assistance*, while the role of *assisting* is foisted onto Australia.

Yet, the deployment of development aid is not necessarily altruistic. Donor nations benefit through deals made in terms of trade and through interest paid by nations who receive financial aid. As Erhard Eppler states in regards to development aid: "...developing countries became the 'markets of tomorrow'" (1972: 76), thus intimating that development aid is a profit-making strategy that enables donor nations to create market opportunities, profit from them, as well as ensure that these economic exchanges and profiteering occur under the conditional terms stipulated by the donor nation (Firth 1999: 243).

However, the categories normatively used when discussing development aid naturalise an altruistic manner which donor nations, such as Australia, supposedly embody. For instance, the categories of "donor" and "recipient" indicate that those classified as "donors"

benevolently bestow aid, while “recipient” implies that “recipient nations” are at the receiving end of donor generosity. These categories elide that “donor” nations also receive benefits from their participation in development aid, and that “recipient” nations produce financial benefits and strengthen the “donor” nation’s geopolitical standing in international social orders. Consequently, the categories of “donor” and “recipient” do not engage with the simultaneous giving and receiving that occurs between “donor” and “recipient” nations of development aid.

Within the guidelines and conditions of the GADC, the category of “donor” nation is applied to Australia through the blatant assertion that Australia is in charge of giving assistance to the Philippines. The descriptor of “donor” is a loaded term that implies benevolence on the part of Australia as a “donor” nation. Such an assertion of Australian benevolence denies the unequal relations of discursive, political and economic power that determine what can or cannot become recognised as “benevolence” within a white social order (Riggs 2004b). The underbelly of such “benevolence” is invisibilised within formal political practice. Hence, Australia is continually constituted as generously assisting the Philippines, while the Philippines is seen as the more hapless nation that receives Australian assistance.

Whiteness as Racialised Colour

This specified *knowledge* enables the management of both nations. But, in the same way that Australia is projected as assisting the Philippines, Australia ‘takes up’ the role of managing the non-western other. Such authority positions the non-white nation/people as

dependent on the white nation. Here, the performative act of white benevolence works to (re)produce paternal relations of dependency on ‘charity’. These relations occur through Australia’s position as a white, western, First-World nation, and the consignment of the Philippines as a non-white, non-western, Third-World nation. For instance, Kipling’s emphasis on “white” as denoting a specific role, intimates that identity is made apparent through (racialised) colour. This iterates that race, and whiteness in general, compels socio-cultural progress. Subjective capacities and capabilities, as well as status within the social order, become “readable” on the chromatic surfaces of the skin (Ahmed and Stacey 2001).

Skin colour thus ‘speaks’ of interior character, wherein pale coloured flesh denotes a *natural* disposition for munificence. The authoritative position of whiteness can be evidenced through the lack of information about non-white Australians participating with Filipinos (and vice-versa) in the Philippines or in Australia during the 1990s in the *Philippines-Australia Relations* booklet. However, such interactions abound. For instance, Solidarity Philippines Australia Network (SPAN) is an organisation founded in 1983 by Filipino migrants. This organisation continues to work with Aboriginal Australians to develop effective intercultural communication. In fact, one of SPAN’s main objectives is to “support the spiritual and cultural re-empowerment of the Indigenous Peoples in Australia” (SPAN 1996).

Despite SPAN’s relative longevity as a group which embodies the role of being a ‘good neighbour’ towards Indigenous Australians (and vice versa), this relationship (or any like it) is not outlined in the booklet. This is despite the fact that the booklet purports to explain important relations between Australia

and the Philippines/Filipinos. Intercultural and interracial solidarity, as well as being a 'good neighbour' is only made conspicuous when a white individual/institution is involved. This focus iterates Australia as a *natural* white space wherein 'white' people are able to gain positive public acknowledgement of their actions. Here, it is only 'white' individuals who are presented as having power and importance. In this context, interaction with white people is constituted as the most valid, thus positioning white people as the only source from which productive socio-cultural interventions can flourish. An Aboriginal/white/non-white migrant dichotomy is thus elided within dominant governmental practices. These practices are complicit in continuing Indigenous dispossession by arranging bilateral activities in the name of all Australians (by acting on behalf of Australia) but not taking into account many Australians who live in the nation. It is not common for Indigenous viewpoints to be represented when Australia creates and deploys governmental contracts which determine Australia's relationship with the Philippines and Filipinos. These negotiations are worked on without the input of Australian Indigenous delegations.³

The elision of Indigeneity packages Australia as a white, western-centric nation which is emphasised through the physical appearances of members of the Australian parliament, as well as to these people's cultural heritage which is predominantly of an Anglo-Celtic ethnicity, an ethnicity coded as white within Australia's normative social order. Key roles in Australia's government continue to be occupied by white individuals. For example, all of Australia's prime ministers have been white. Therefore, as Aileen Moreton-Robinson states, Australia is a black land

positioned as a white nation state (2006). Because of this, Australia's authoritative power within the Asia-Pacific, as well as Australia's role as a "good neighbour", is tied with Australia's status as a white Western country with First-World privileges (Hardjono 1993). This First-World privilege is reiterated by Kipling's emphasis on the "white man" and "sons" engaging in a paternalistic relationship with their "captives". The repeated capitalisation of "White Man" also projects an authoritative whiteness that is befitting a 'First World' positioning.

First-World Whiteness

To be consigned as 'First-World' indicates that relations with non First-World regions involve asymmetrical relations of power that quantifies nations in terms of economic sustainability. Within such a hierarchy, the Philippines is recognised as a Third-World nation with 'lower' standards of living in comparison to Australia. Thus, to even venture into a non-white/non-First-World space is dangerous for white people. The threat of suffering inflicted by the racial/ethnic other is intimated in Kipling's poem when he describes the effects of white men (the "sons" of the white empire) migrating to a non-white locale. According to Kipling, the crossing of geographical borders is a diasporic nightmare: "Go bind your sons to exile" (1899: 215), "To wait in heavy harness" (1899: 215), and, "To veil the threat of terror" (1899: 216). The non-white space/body is packaged as a site of and for disruption, having the capacity to *threaten* the white space or inevitably push the white 'First-World' individual to witness non-white suffering.

In the launch for *The Philippines: Beyond the Crisis* study, Downer projected the Philippines as embroiled with natural Third-World suffering. He said: "The

Philippines looks set for a relatively rapid recovery from the effects of the region's recent financial difficulties" (1998: 2). Although his statement indicates that the Philippines is moving away from suffering, Downer engages in a pathological discursive construction of the Philippines by describing the nation in terms of sickness (for example, through the use of the word, 'recovery'). In this respect, whiteness is performed as a *healthy* space, wherein white individuals can *diagnose* the Philippines, prescribe what needs to be done to make the Philippines *better*, and thus compassionately act as a *selfless* benefactor who helps their "captives" (and hence, their subordinates) despite negative consequences arising through contact with non-whiteness.

In Kipling's terms, this development occurs under the figure of an omnipresent white Father. The Father is unnamed, thus emphasizing those whom the "Father" lords over: the non-white other that is consigned as "half-devil and half-child" (1899: 215). From this, the "Father" becomes a familial father figure who nurtures the 'child's' development. Moreover, the "Father" becomes coded with a spiritual signification wherein the white father figure becomes synonymous with the heavenly Father (God) who 'reforms'. White bodies are thus recognised as omnipotent figures. According to Eleanor Carbonell, a Filipina woman living in Australia, deification of white bodies is common for Filipinos (2005). Such deference to white power is the consequence of the long history of Castilian Spanish colonial control of the Philippines and North American imperialism, both of which have reduced the Philippines to a state of colonial dependency (Laforteza 2007).

Although Australia is not the Spanish *amo*⁴ or the North American leader,

Australia's position as a white First-World country constitutes the Australian nation as an *amo* in relation to the Philippines. In fact, Australia was and remains in a better economic situation than the Philippines. In the 1990s, the Philippine peso (PHP) was an undervalued currency in context to the U.S. dollar (USD). The average exchange value from 1993-97 was 27 PHP to 1 USD, with a record low during 1997-1998 when the peso fell by over 60 percent as a result of the fallout of the Asian financial currency crisis (Bank Introduction 2006a). Accordingly, the Philippines has been plagued by low foreign investment and large public debts.

Conversely, in 1996, the Australian dollar (AUD) had an average exchange valuation of 79.7 U.S. cents (Bank Introduction 2006b). During the 1990s, Australia's economy boomed with strong annual GDP growth of four percent. This resulted in productivity growth that averaged 2.7 percent during the 1990s, a move that Bank Introduction.com describes as "one of the world's best [economic] performances" (2006b). In these contexts, Australia has better economic opportunity to assist the Philippines, rather than the Philippines financially helping Australia. The emphasis, in this context, is on the outflow of support from Australia to its South-East Asian neighbour, rather than the inflow of substantial aid coming from the Philippines to Australia. This denies that the Philippines can also help Australia, ensuring that the Philippines is fixed as a nation in constant need of western intervention, a pliable space open for western trade and governance.

White (Wo)Man's Burden

Although the focus so far has centred on the concept of a "White Man's burden"

as a system of enacting social relations, a "White burden", as an act of service to the non-white other, also implicates white women. This can be evidenced when white women seek to assist non-white women because it is their 'duty'. Trinh T. Minh-ha specifies that although non-white women are invited to speak at academic forums on the topic of "women's issues", these forums circulate (even if unintentionally) on whiteness as the normative "speaking" subject position (1989: 80-116). Consequently, non-whites are consigned as individuals who are defined by their perceived differences to a normative white social order.

Events which aim to foster bilateral efficiency between Australia and the Philippines and speak of Filipino-Australian and Australian relations mirror this focus on whiteness. Although they are facilitated by and/or include white women, these interactions still eventuate along conditional terms determined by the white social order. Here, I cite the mismanagement of the wrongful deportation of Filipina-Australian Vivian Alvarez Solon Young by the Immigration Department Minister, Amanda Vanstone. There are many examples to chose from, but I focus on the way that Vanstone presented herself and her involvement with Alvarez Solon Young's case. On the radio program, *The World Today* (ABC), a segment titled: *Immigration Dept handled Solon case catastrophically* was aired on 6 October 2005. Here, Vanstone said:

AMANDA VANSTONE: Well look, there have been calls for me to step aside from, actually, March 1996. It's been a pretty consistent effort. (sound of laughter)

I'm thinking of trying to buy the copyright on Elton John's song *I'm Still Standing*, but I don't want to tempt fate. So I'll just play it to myself quietly at night (2005).

During this radio broadcast, Alvarez Solon Young was still in the Philippines, dependent on using a wheelchair to move around. She was still waiting to be flown back to Australia, see her children, and return home to her friends and family. Vanstone's appropriation of Elton John's song *I'm Still Standing* is a callous message when put in conjunction to Alvarez Solon Young's difficulty in moving without the use of a wheelchair and her inability to move across nations to return home. During this radio broadcast, the Immigration Department under Amanda Vanstone and Philip Ruddock continued "to torment Vivian Solon's life through protracted arbitration" (Newhouse 2006). Yet, Vanstone posits herself as the 'victim' and 'survivor' in relation to dealing with Alvarez Solon Young. She constitutes herself as the Aussie battler who pushes through strife to come out as a triumphant survivor. From this, Australia and the Australian government do not lose their upper hand by allowing Alvarez Solon Young to claim a sense of victimhood and survival that will obligate Australia to account for their complicities in colonialist atrocities. In this context "decency and goodness acquire an almost ontological status as the focus shifts from the suffering of the [non-white] dispossessed and bereaved to a celebration of Australianness" (Perera 2004: paragraph 4). Although Perera's statement refers to the December 2004 tsunami, Vanstone's triumphalist narrativising of the Australian nation and the Australian self in the Alvarez Solon Young case, shows the ongoing validity of Perera's analysis. In this respect, a positioning of the Philippines as having the capacity to harm benevolent white people eventuates through the rubric of the white burden of assistance.

Orientalist Practices

The claim to authoritatively *know* and *respond* to the Philippines cannot be separated from the various types of authority that are combined in Orientalism. Edward Said describes Orientalism as constituting a symbolic order that gains operative effects through various socio-cultural productions (1995: 12). It is a system that creates specific perceptual practices that define the limits of the "Orient's" subjectivity. This sense of defining (and being defined) eventuates through an "uneven exchange" sustained by Orientalist thought and action. I postulate that this "uneven exchange" with and between various types of power are shaped by the distinctions expounded between the "Orient" and the "Occident", as well as with 'white' and 'non-white' in the context of Australia's bilateral economic relations with the Philippines.

It can be evidenced that conspicuous acts of 'neighbouring' operate/d within an Orientalist framework. For instance, the GADC and *The Philippines: Beyond the Crisis* study deployed geo-political awareness of the Philippines' economic underdevelopment by publishing written accounts of the Philippine's geo-political status, by holding meetings wherein Australian and Filipino political dignitaries and economists discussed the Philippines' economic situation and by announcing that the Philippines needed economic restructure. The distribution of such knowledge was filtered through a range of texts, which included the *Philippines-Australia Relations* booklet. In Orientalist form, this booklet *explains* key aspects of Australian-Philippine bilateral economic relations, thus intimating that Australia and the Philippines are already *known*. These nations are pronounced as having a "fundamental" *root* point

which embodies an inherent essential being that remains unchanged. Complex economic flows from Australia to the Philippines (and vice versa), as well as flows of labour and analysis between these nations, are packaged as manageable units of study that can be defined and governed (Said 1995: 115).

Australia and the Philippines are constituted as definable through marking out their differences from one another. For instance, although the GADC and *The Philippines: Beyond the Crisis* study were launched to encourage interaction between Australia and the Philippines, this interaction has limits. Separation is reiterated through the GADC and *The Philippines: Beyond The Crisis* study by their focus on the outflow of financial aid from Australia to the Philippines, rather than including how aid is being distributed to Filipino communities within Australia. This focus demonstrates that Australia locates 'Asia' outside the body of its nation, and thereby fails to acknowledge Asian-Australians within the nation. Such a positional difference enables Australia to engage in various relationships with the Philippines (and with 'Asia' in general) without losing the relative upper hand (Said 1995: 7). To retain the "upper hand", the act of *containing* the Philippines and Australia within specific *knowledge* occurs. This sense of containment can be evidenced through Alexander Downer's address at the launch of the East Asia Analytical Unit's Report on the Philippines on 4 May 1998. Downer specifies:

When I visited the Philippines in October last year I expressed confidence that the Philippines under President Ramos had got a number of very important things right in tackling the problems the

President faced when elected in 1992 (1998: 1).

Downer projects himself as the purveyor of progress and failure. Although he mentions that the Philippine president at the time, Fidel V. Ramos, was influential in these reforms, he does not include Ramos' opinions on the Philippines' economic situation. Instead, it is Downer's perspective that registers the Philippines as knowable within the Australian social order. In this case, "he [the west/Australia] is never concerned with the Orient except as the first cause of what he (sic) says" (Said 1995: 21). To affiliate with the Philippines is to cite the Philippines in an Australian 'voice' and by an Australian citizen. That the Philippines makes sense within a global economic market thus depends more on the west's representation of its South-East Asian neighbour, than on the Philippines itself. Consequently, the GADC, *The Philippines: Beyond the Crisis* and its corresponding public relations events (such as Downer's public speeches) espouse Orientalism:

Dealing with it [the 'Orient'] by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (Said 1995: 3).

In this process of constituting the "Orient", the white western self is also constituted. This development of white western identity entails the performative practice of whiteness in order to pass as white, western, and First-World.

Racial Performativity

Kipling's urging to "take up" the White Man's burden intimates that the white role of colonial benevolence is not an ontological truth. Being white and

western involves strategic action to posit oneself as a specific white subject, group or nation. This (dis)embodiment of norms intimates that agency can (re)conceptualise perceptions and practices. Here, I wish to open a space for resignification by evoking awareness as to how formal Australian governmental practices situate themselves within the Asia-Pacific and with their Asian neighbours.

Taking the lead from academics such as Sara Ahmed (2000, 2001) and Nadine Ehlers (2004), I refigure Butler's conceptualisation of gender as a performative practice in terms of race. By this, I do not mean to exchange 'gender' with 'race'. I do not intend to conflate the two or imply that one can speak for the other. However, one is constitutive of the other and both (along with other factors, such as age, class, etc.) constitute individuals concomitantly. In this respect, aspects of the complex matrix of gendered or sexed (or making a person gendered or sexed) identity can be used to explore the processes which work to racialise identity.

In *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, Butler conceptualises performative acts as "forms of authoritative speech... that, in the uttering, also perform a certain exercise and exercise a binding power..." (1993: 225). Whiteness, as a performative practice, thus becomes a citational act that is contained in and recognised through speech acts. Kipling's "White Man's Burden" reiterates the need to exercise whiteness through verbalised declarations of white authority: "by open speech" (Kipling 1899: 216). "Open" in this context, refers to a public space. This 'open space' intimates that whiteness needs to be 'said' (whether by verbal enunciation or non-verbal behaviour) in a public space and

recognised by the 'public' as whiteness. Individuals thus gain credibility as white subjects through conspicuous public performance. However, things that are *not* said and *not* performed also work to assume a specific social designation. Performativity is as much about what one does *not* declare as about what one does. This performative elision can be evidenced through a 'reading between the lines' of the *Philippines-Australia Relations* booklet, the GADC, and *The Philippines: Beyond the Crisis* study. Although these texts purport to exhaustively explain Australia's economic relations with the Philippines, key aspects of these economic ties are not acknowledged as a major facet of the Philippine-Australian alliance.

One unacknowledged aspect is the 'trading' of Filipina wives. The Philippine government has promoted the export of brides as a measure that eases unemployment and generates foreign exchange. This occurs despite the Republic Act No. 6955 which criminalises the exportation of Filipinas as wives. The Act comprises a set of laws approved on 13 June 1990 by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the Philippine Congress. These laws stipulate that it is unlawful for any person, association, club or any other entity to match Filipino women for marriage to foreign nationals on mail-order basis or other similar practices. Yet, mail-order bride industries are used. Many of these businesses are established outside of the Philippines, ensuring that they remain outside the jurisdiction of Philippine law (Monte 1999). Moreover, the Philippines benefits from sustaining the mail-order bride business because of remittances gained from them. These remittances have kept the economy afloat, turning in a total of U.S. \$3.16 billion in remittances (from overseas Filipino workers and mail-order brides) from January to July alone in 1998 (Monte

1999). By the term 'mail-order bride' I refer to a:

woman whose personal details with an accompanying photograph are advertised through a printed catalogue [whether on the Internet, 'marriage' agency brochures, etc.] and whose decision to enter into marriage is made with virtually very little or no personal introduction (Cahill 1990: 133).

In this context, 'mail order bride' becomes a value-laden term coded as marking the economic and sexual marketing and/or trafficking of 'Third-World' women into 'First-World' western spaces. Here, I do not mean to conflate mail-order brides with sexual trafficking. However, under the guise of matchmaking, many mail-order bride services export Filipinas into the sex industry (Cunneen and Stubbs 2003: 76-77). For instance, the Internet site 'The Mail Order Bride Warehouse' (see: www.goodwife.com/asian/) presents Filipinas as body parts for sale. Filipinas are processed as wholesale export products that can be bought from a 'warehouse' for the buyer's sexual pleasure.

Sexual trafficking and mail order bride businesses are not included as factors of economic distribution in the GADC, *The Philippines: Beyond the Crisis* study and the *Philippine-Australia Relations* booklet. This is despite the fact, that as of 25 February 1999, there were an estimated 20,000 Filipina mail-order brides in Australia (Monte 1999). Also, Australian nationals own 15 of the 18 hotels, and 40 of the 70 bars, in Angeles City, Philippines which profit from sex trafficking (Monte 1999). However, Australia's complicity in the distribution of Filipinas as wholesale (sexual) commodities is invisibilised within government rhetoric and formal public performances of an Australian

partnership with the Philippines. In this context, the invisibilisation and visibilisation (through tacit insinuations or blatant declarations) of different forms and effects of white power are “played out on the body” (Ahmed 2000: 86). According to Ahmed, performative gestures that “speak” of a person's identity and its status in relation to other identities/bodies are communicated through the body of another (2000: 86). Bodies in this case refer to corporeal bodies and institutional bodies, such as government and business organisations. For instance, the constitution of the Australian nation as economically superior to the Philippines eventuates through reducing Filipinos as pliable *bodies*. Consequently, the distribution of women as sexual commodities becomes justifiable. Australia is thus consigned as the *amo* of the Philippines. The recognition of Australia as the ‘boss’ of the Philippines can be evidenced through the conditions of aid giving. Stewart Firth specifies:

This is a conditionality that applies...to the way a recipient country is governed. Donors now feel confident in demanding that recipients reform public administration and political institutions along Western lines (1999: 243).

Here, whiteness discursively constitutes the subject within a racialised schema of power. This is a power that shapes bodies/spaces to conform (through the reiteration of implicit and explicit racialised knowledges) to one's consigned racial *essence*. To be white, western and First-World thus involves reiterative labour implemented to reproduce a given sociality. As can be evidenced through the lack of publicised acknowledgement of mail-order bride systems and the sexual trafficking of women, the performative enactment of a white Australian nation

state invests in fostering a perceptual blindness. Such ‘blindness’ constitutes a reductive reality by focusing on specific social practices. This works to contain the white individual, government and nation in the role of a “good neighbour” that interacts with its racial others on the basis of compassion, not through illegal practices or money-grabbing schemes.

Yet, the premise of the GADC centres on economic demands and financial advancement, rather than focusing on the intercultural development of both nations that extends beyond or reconfigures the emphasis on monetary capital. By this, I do not mean to imply that emotional well-being is not (or cannot) be connected with financial advancement. Rather, I mean to point out that the GADC is couched in economic terms, with a strong current of economic determinism and economic rationalism packaging its aims and consequent projects. The GADC is based on producing tangible material products: reports about each country (economic infrastructure, political structure, etc.), and economic profit (trade agreements, distribution of financial aid, etc.). *The Philippines: Beyond the Crisis* study draws on these material affects to initiate future projects and frame the goals of current initiatives. Here, I do not wish to state that such re-imaginings of the flows of bilateral contact between the two nations can evoke a utopian space. Unequal relations of power structure the relations of the “discursive, linguistic, legislative and economic power that determine precisely who can or cannot speak in our culture, and who is actually listened to and authorised to speak” (Pugliese 2005). Therefore, the ways in which re-imagining the spaces in which bilateral trade can be understood, experienced and implemented are determined on uneven relations of power.

The concerns of *The Philippines: Beyond the Crisis* study to make more visible the extent to which Australia and the Philippines are actively engaged with each other is also not met. As the study is touted as an important proposal for both nations to facilitate a good and fair working relationship, it would be beneficial for the study to address and attempt to undo the injustices and illegality espoused by mail-order bride industries. Yet, only specific aspects of the Philippine-Australia connection are publicised. These include events that package both nations/governments as legitimate institutions that behave in a liberal democratic manner. *The Philippines: Beyond the Crisis* study and the signing of the GADC thus formalised a specific bilateral development cooperation, one that invests in fostering socio-cultural blindness that allows for exploitation to occur.

I argue that mail order bride systems and the sexual trafficking of Filipinas are tacitly endorsed through the GADC and *The Philippines: Beyond the Crisis* study. These tacit endorsements enable the performance of whiteness as an authoritative power that dominates over 'non-white' people and spaces. This is deployed through the reiteration of the Philippines as a Third-World nation, which, in turn, codifies the Philippines and Filipinos as pliable bodies/spaces that are open to western governance. By marking these trajectories of white Orientalism, the violent re/impositions of subject constitution can be addressed. I draw upon these violent re/impositions to stress that the political tracts I have examined here are negotiated by nations whose bilateral trade agreements are constituted through colonialist and imperialist measures. The flows of economy, labour and trade that travel from the Philippines to Australia move into stolen Aboriginal land negotiated by a colonising ethic that

allows such negotiations to occur without the input of Indigenous people. This colonising ethic continues in the ways in which Australia positions itself as the authoritative nation state that has the capacity and capability to be the western power within the Asia-Pacific region. Carbonell states: "It's as if Australia is trying to be the next U.S.A." (2006). The implication here is that (white) Australia promotes itself as the economic power within the Asia-Pacific region, thus aligning itself with the economic prowess that the U.S. has. Through this, other nations within this geo-political and geographical space become an addendum to the tripartite colonising coalition of the willing: the U.S., Australia and Britain.

Here, I do not want to dismiss the Philippines as an innocent space or state that Filipinos are simply victims to Orientalist initiatives enacted by 'western powers'. The Philippines is not guiltless but perpetuates a "worlding" process that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak notes as the process in which colonised spaces are called into being within a Eurocentric world order (Ashcroft et al. 1998: 241).⁵

The "worlding" process is deployed through bilateral negotiations such as the GADC and *The Philippines: Beyond the Crisis* study which do not solely continue the dispossession of Australia's Indigenous people but also deploy the continual dispossession of many Filipinos and the Philippines' Indigenous populations and their sovereign rights as First Nation's people. This can be evidenced through projects initiated by Australian mining companies in the Philippines. For example, in the late 1990s, Newcrest Exploration, an Australian Mining company, was conducting mining exploration in the uplands of Abra in the Philippines. Although this venture was sanctioned by

both the Australian and Philippine Governments, such mining expeditions were vehemently opposed by Philippine residents. Magno Dumas, a farmer from Tubo, Abra specifies: "It will be war if Newcrest insists on operating in the area" (cited in Codiase 1996: 1).

On the contemporary effects of mining companies in the Philippines, Jennifer Awingan, an Indigenous Kalinga-Igorot from the Philippines states: "Indigenous people are no longer able to plant fruits or vegetables because the resulting mercury poisoning, produced from massive logging and mining operations, inhibits the growth of any plant life" (cited in Sterrit 2005: 1). Both the Philippines and Australia are complicit in such practices. Austrade declared that:

Most of the Philippine mining companies are familiar with the capability of Australia in the mining industry and already source their equipment from Australia. An example is Lepanto Mining Corporation, one of the major Philippine mining companies, which purchases more than 50 per cent of its mining equipment requirements from Australia (2007: 1).

Conclusion

These aforementioned activities do not simply create distinctions and divisions between Australia and the Philippines, but create borders between Filipinos themselves. There are Filipinos who benefit from bilateral arrangements and there are those who do not. The point in which Filipinos can prosper is through understanding and acknowledging that western initiatives for development are necessary. Thus, those who partake and promote such bilateral negotiations are perceived by normative dominant Australian and Philippine social orders as initiating progress and modern

development. This is a perception that is founded on the hope of acquiring material economic profit. As the joint ministerial statement of the 2005 Inaugural Philippines-Australia Ministerial Meeting specifies:

Australian mining companies were well placed to participate in the development of the Philippines' mineral resources. Increased Australian investment had the potential to yield significant economic and developmental benefits to the Philippines and represented a significant prospective destination for Australian investment (Downer and Vaile 2005).

The aforementioned statement intimates that through Australian-Philippine partnership both nations' geo-political and economic standing in a world market economy will be significantly bolstered. Therefore, by participating in such projects, the Philippines and Australia can insinuate themselves as necessary (economic contenders) in the global market economy and international agendas powered predominantly by North American and Anglo, Euro-centric agendas. Consequently, I state that "worlding" is an Orientalist process in which the Philippines and Australia, through the bilateral agreements I have discussed, assert themselves as valid, productive nations that authorise the powerful position of whiteness.

This is what shapes the conditions, guidelines and procedures of the bilateral negotiations I have tracked in this paper: the insidious, repetitive authorisation of western whiteness in shaping the relations (whether governmental, personal, etc.) without critique and intervention. This cannot be allowed to continue, nor can it be ignored. Maria Giannacopoulos states: "There is a violence in this act of forgetting" (2007: 45). I draw on her

statement to reiterate that violence takes shape not solely in forgetting specific events. Violence is also deployed in forgetting to speak out about them and in ignoring the ways in which people, nations, and the bilateral flows between them are spoken for and legislated as governmental contracts, projects and definitive facts that mask the underbelly of bilateral 'partnerships'.

Author Note

Elaine Laforteza is a PhD candidate in Critical and Cultural Studies, Macquarie University. For five years, she has written for the newspaper, *Philippine Community Herald*. Currently, she is working on a thesis which interrogates how understandings of 'home' and development are deployed through bilateral activities that constitute the Australia-Philippines nexus.

Elaine.Laforteza@scmp.mq.edu.au

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Eleanor Carbonell, Elaine Kelly and Joseph Pugliese for reading earlier drafts of this work and helping me formulate the ideas in this paper. Also, thank you to my anonymous reviewers and Maria Giannacopoulos and Lara Palombo for their editorial advice. Further, my thanks go to Goldie Osuri for her continual academic and personal support.

References

- Ahmed, S. 2000. *Embodying Strangers*, in A. Horner and A. Keane (eds.) *Body Matters: Feminism, Textuality, Corporeality*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Ahmed, S. & Stacey, J. 2001. *Thinking Through the Skin*, London: Routledge.

- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G. & Triffin, H. 1998. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, London: Routledge.
- Austrade. 2007. *Mining to the Philippines: Trends and Opportunities*. Viewed 19 March 2007, from <http://www.austrade.gov.au/Mining-to-the-Philippines/default.aspx>
- Bank Introduction. 2006a. *Philippines*. Viewed 2 April 2005, from <http://www.bankintroductions.com/philippines.html>.
- Bank Introduction. 2006b. *Australia*. Viewed 2 April 2005, from <http://www.bankintroductions.com/australia.html>.
- Butler, J. 1993. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, New York and London: Routledge.
- Cahill, D. 1990. *Intermarriages in International Contexts*, Quezon City: Scalabrini Migration Centre.
- Camilleri, J. A. 2004. 'The Howard years: Cultural ambivalence and political dogma', *borderlands e-journal*, 3: 3. Viewed 4 June 2007, from http://www.borderlandsejournal.aelaide.edu.au/vol3no3_2004/camilleri_howard.htm.
- Carbonell, E. 2005. *Personal Communication*, Sydney, Australia.
- Carbonell, E. 2006. *Personal Communication*, Sydney, Australia.
- Codiase, A. 1996. *Australian Mining Companies in the Philippines: Abra uplanders threaten war on Newcrest*. Viewed 18 March 2007, from <http://cpcabrisbane.org/Kasama/1996/V10n4/Nordis.htm>.
- Coorey, P. 2007. 'History must not be our master: PM', *The Sydney Morning Herald*. March 14. Viewed 18 March 2007, from <http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/history-must-not-be-our-master-pm/2007/03/13/1173722471283.html>.
- Cunneen, C. & Stubbs, J. 2003. *Fantasy Islands: Desire, "Race" and Violence*, in S. Tomsen and M. Donaldson (eds.) *Male Trouble: Looking at*

- Australian Masculinities*, Victoria: Pluto Press.
- DFAT. 1998a. *The Philippines: Beyond The Crisis*. Viewed 13 June 2007, from <http://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/pdf/philippines.pdf>.
- DFAT. 1998b. *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Canberra: Australia Treaty Series 1998 No. 11*. Viewed 31 March 2005, from <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/dfat/treaties/1998/11.html>
- Downer, A. 1998. *The Philippines: Beyond The Crisis, Address by The Hon Alexander Downer, MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs, to the launch of the East Asia Analytical Unit's Report on the Philippines, 4 May*, Melbourne. Viewed 4 April 2005, from <http://www.dfat.gov.au/media/speeches/foreign/1998/philippines4may98.html>.
- Downer, A. & Vaile, M. 2005. *Inaugural Philippines-Australia Ministerial Meeting: Joint Ministerial Statement*. Viewed 19 March 2007, from http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/releases/2005/joint_philippines_120805.html.
- Ehlers, N. 2004. *Sanctioning Race: Disciplinary, Performativity and Resignifications*. Unpublished Ph.D. diss., Macquarie University.
- Embassy of the Philippines, Canberra Australia. 2005. *Philippines-Australia Relations*. Viewed 13 June 2006, from <http://www.philembassy.au.com/download/RPAUS-feb05.pdf>.
- Eppler, E. 1972. *Not Much Time For The Third World*, London: Oswald Wolff Limited.
- Firth, S. 1999. *Australia In International Politics: An Introduction to Australian foreign policy*, Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin.
- Giannacopoulos, M. 2007. *Mabo, Tampa and the Non-Justiciability of Sovereignty*, in S. Perera (ed.) *Our Patch: Enacting Australian Sovereignty Post 2001*, Perth: Network Books.
- Hardjono, R. 1993. *White Tribe of Asia: An Indonesian View of Australia*, Victoria: Hyland House Publishing Pty Limited.
- Jayawardena, K. 1995. *The White Woman's Other Burden: Western Woman and South Asia During British Colonial Rule*, New York & London: Routledge.
- Jordan, W. E. 1974. *The White Man's Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kipling, R. 1899. *Collected Verse of Rudyard Kipling*, 2005, USA: Kessinger Publishing Co.
- Laforteza, E. 2007. 'The whitening of brown skins and the darkening of whiteness', *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture*. Viewed 18 March 2007, from <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/071/laforteza.shtml>.
- Marglin, S. 2003. 'Development as poison: Rethinking the western model of modernity', *Development and Modernization*, 25:1. Viewed 19 March 2007, from <http://hir.harvard.edu/articles/1104/>.
- Minh-ha, T. T. 1989. *Woman, Native, Other: Writing, Post coloniality and Feminism*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Monte, J. L. 1999. *Across Borders: Sex Trafficking of Women*. Viewed 18 April 2006, from <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/54a/235.html>.
- Moreton-Robinson, A. 2000. *Talkin Up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism*, St Lucia: UQP.
- Moreton-Robinson, A. 2006. 'Everyday encounters: Witnessing the workings of white possession', *Borderpolitics of Whiteness Conference*, 11-13 December, Carlton Crest Hotel Sydney.
- Newhouse, G. 2006. 'Still Waiting: The

- Need for Culture Change in the Department of Immigration'. *Unfinished Business: Where To Now For The Refugee Policy?* Viewed 19 March 2007, from <http://cpcabrisbane.org/Kasama/2006/V20n1/StillWaiting.htm>.
- Oxfam Australia. 2003. *Australian Mining Companies Undermine Australian Peace Claims*. Viewed 19 April 2007, from <http://www.oxfam.org.au/media/article.php?id=85>.
- Perera, S. 2004. 'The good neighbour: Conspicuous compassion and the politics of proximity', *borderlands e-journal*, 3: 3. Viewed 8 September 2006, from http://www.borderlandsejournal.adelaide.edu.au/vol3no3_2004/perera_good.htm.
- Pugliese, J. 2005. *An Ethics of Speech. Racism Within: How Should Macquarie University Respond to Andrew Fraser*, 5 August, Macquarie University.
- Riggs, D.W. 2004a. 'Benevolence and the management of stake: On being "good white people"', *Philament: An Online Journal of the Arts and Culture*, 4. Viewed 20 March 2007, from http://www.arts.usyd.edu.au/publications/philament/issue4_Critique_Riggs.htm.
- Riggs, D.W. 2004b. 'Constructing the national good: Howard and the rhetoric of benevolence'. *Australasian Political Studies Association Conference*, 29 September-1 October, University of Adelaide.
- Said, E. 1995. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, London: Penguin Books.
- SPAN. 1996. *Aims and Constitution of Solidarity Philippines Australia Network (SPAN)*. Viewed 10 November 2006, from <http://cpcabrisbane.org/SPAN/Aims.htm>
- Spivak, G. 1985. The Rani of Simur, in F. Barker et al. (eds.) *Europe and Its Others Vol. 1 Proceedings of the Essex Conference on the Sociology of Literature*, Colchester: University of Essex.
- Sterrit, A. *Cultural Survival: Promoting the Rights, Voices and Visions of Indigenous Peoples*. Viewed 19 March 2007, from <http://www.cs.org/publications/win/win-article.cfm?id=2699>.
- Stratton, J. 1998. *Race Daze: Australia in Identity Crisis*, Annandale: Pluto Press.
- Vanstone, A. 2005. 'Immigration Dept handled Solon case catastrophically', *The World Today*. Viewed 15 December 2006, from <http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2005/s1476140.htm>

Notes

¹ Bilney retired from Parliament in 1996, taking up a *Sydney Morning Herald* column from 1997-2000. Yet, his retirement did not impede him from being in a position to act as a signatory of the GADC in 1998.

² For more work on 'white woman's burden' see Jayawardena (1995). For a more detailed discussion on the ways in which white women contribute to colonising initiatives see Minh-ha (1989) and Moreton-Robinson (2000).

³ These negotiations are also deployed at the expense of Indigenous Filipinos, as will be discussed later in this paper.

⁴ In Tagalog, the word *amo* translates as master.

⁵ For a more detailed discussion of worlding, see Spivak (1985).