

Shifting the 'White Gaze' on Black Bodies in Philippine Collegiate Basketball

Toward a Structural Understanding of Covert Racism in the Global South

In a postcolonial Global South context, the representation of race seems to persist and is manifested through the media scripting of Black African sporting bodies that in effect extends the deployment of the “White gaze,” the effort to explore the Black body within the context of white supremacy. Through a qualitative content analysis of media texts in the Philippines, the paper illustrates how in a postmodern context racial stereotypes literally play out within Philippine collegiate basketball framed by the “White gaze” that expresses a covert form of racism that supports an essentialist deployment of categories of race. The paper ends with a call for praxis that critiques subtle racialized ideologies and institutionalized racism in a postmodern Global South context.

KEYWORDS: Black bodies, collegiate basketball, Global South, new racism, Philippines, White gaze

INTRODUCTION

According to Stuart McPhail Hall (1990), a Jamaican-born British cultural theorist and one of the proponents of the British Cultural Studies school of thought, media deliberately or subconsciously constructs race in a way that reproduces ideologies of racism. In reference to “Blacks” in sports, their representation has unquestionably suffered from a system of covertly entrenched racist ideology, which have in turn inscribed them with sets of “unquestionable assumptions” (Hall 1990, 13) about their physical attributes and athleticism. As Hall (1990, 10–11) argues, “the media are especially important sites for the production, reproduction, and circulation of ideologies [that] work by the transformation of discourses . . . and the transformation of subjects-to-action.” In this regard, Billy Hawkins (2010), a professor in the Sport Management and Policy program at the University of Georgia, USA, opines in *The New Plantation: Black Athletes, College Sports, and Predominantly White NCAA Institutions* that the role of mass media fluctuates as a lens to celebrate cultural diversity and instead reinforces dominant racist ideologies. Hawkins’s argument was made in the context of the controversial relationship between Black athletes and the predominantly White managed National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Institutions in the USA. He provides a conceptual framework for understanding the magnitude of the forces that harm many Black athletes and in effect calls for reform, collective accountability, and collective consciousness among Black male athletes to counter such harmful practices.

In this paper, I draw on Stuart Hall (1997) to argue that media practices of representation of Black African student athletes in the Philippines are ideologically informed by the “White gaze.” As Joe Feagin (2009, 11) notes, the White gaze makes “powerful use of stereotypes [and] images, and in provid[ing] the language and interpretations that help structure, normalize, and make sense out of [a racially structured] society.” According to Roland Barthes (1999), the White gaze applies meaning to the hypervisible black bodies by affixing (stereotyped) meanings to them in the public arena through the processes of representation. In this regard, I provide an illustrative case of the media scripting of Black athletic bodies in Philippine collegiate sports to illustrate how racial stereotypes and “big picture narratives” literally play out on Black basketball players’ bodies. In so doing, the paper elucidates that the deployment of the White gaze in framing racial ideologies on Black African athletes in the

Philippines is structured in “othering” practices that are intertwined with masculine nationalists and in the commercialization of collegiate basketball. The paper draws on Hall’s (1980) notion of race as a discursive system that is never purely ideological or cultural but situated in everyday social and economic relations. Hall (2002, 453) therefore contends that “[r]ace, in that sense, is a discursive system, which has ‘real’ social, economic and political conditions of existence and ‘real’ symbolic and material effects.”

The paper is divided into four distinct parts. The first part conceptualizes the White gaze by describing how it becomes a guiding tool that renders its invisible dominance of whiteness while treating ethno-cultural difference as fixed traits linked to a primordial essence. The second part situates the presence of African student athletes in Philippine collegiate basketball and how they have become polarizing figures characterized by debates in the public sphere on the pros and cons of their enlistment in college teams. This section sets the context for the third part of the paper highlighting the deployment of the White gaze in Philippine media. This deliberately or subconsciously constructs a racist image of African student basketball players that reproduces the ideologies of racism. Such ideologies are grounded on a set of white framed assumptions on Blacks. In a critique, this section notes that the role of mass media fluctuates as a lens to celebrate cultural diversity when it reinforces certain ideologies that perceive Black athletes in certain assumed frames that continue to emphasize the “otherness” of or in black sporting bodies. The fourth part of the paper offers a critical discussion to illustrate how racist media scripting of Black African student athletes in Philippine collegiate sports is structured in gender, nationalistic, and corporate capitalistic systems. In its contemporary nature, this “new racism” is covert in nature of what should be the discredited biological referents of the overt form of old racism (Ansell 1997), infusing it with a new form related to an alleged “threat” that people of color pose to the society’s majority race.

I conclude the paper by articulating a call made by critical race theorist and sociologist Melissa Weiner (2012) in “Toward a Global Critical Race Theory” that scholars, especially in the Global South, must address the persistent othering, oppression, and exclusion of groups based on perceived and essentialized physical and cultural differences. The inability to redress such racialized inequalities, structures, ideologies, and discourses only impedes, rather than expands, the status of racialized minority groups as equal (global)

citizens. I argue that doing this requires an unraveling of postmodern racism's core features by questioning how racialized forms of media-constructed ideologies structured in social systems reproduce racial inequalities in a covert manner invisible to both media scripters, the general public, and collegiate sports organizers in the Philippines.

DEPLOYING THE “WHITE GAZE” AS A LENS FOR NORMALIZING RACIST INTERPRETATIONS

The White gaze is the exploration of “the Black body within the context of whiteness” (Yancy 2008, xv). Reference is made to Frantz Fanon's (1967) critical perspective of the lived experiences of Blacks in examining how those experiences are erased by prototypical conceptualizations of the black body in the white imaginary. At the center of Fanon's (1967) *Black Skin, White Masks* argument is that the body of the Black man is gazed upon, “humiliated, mocked, beaten, raped, assaulted, and murdered” (Vergés 1997, 582). The White gaze therefore becomes a conceptual and interpretative scheme that shapes and channels assessments of everyday events and encounters with people of color” (Feagin 2009, 11). In turn, these explanations become seen as the “normal reality of common-sense” (Hooks 1992, 75). In this racialized framing, media scripts are used to explain the ways in which black bodies are infused with “normalized” stereotypical meanings (Jackson 2006) and therefore become the “paths for interpreting information” (Bonilla-Silva 2003, 26). However, whereas Feagin and Bonilla-Silva use the descriptor of white racial frames, Ronald Jackson utilizes the idea of scripts to explain how black bodies are infused with stereotyped meanings, which perpetuate certain racial ideologies that Yancy (2005) contends reinforce the hypervisibility of Blacks. The same frame and scripts are applied in constructing African student athletes' hypervisibility in Philippine collegiate sport.

AFRICAN STUDENT ATHLETES IN PHILIPPINE COLLEGIATE BASKETBALL

Basketball is the most popular sport in the Philippines. Historically rooted in the American colonial project of a school's physical education curriculum, the sport became entrenched in the indoctrinating pedagogical policies of the American colonial government in

the Philippines (Antolihao 2010). Since then, basketball in the Philippines has evolved and has become one of the most awaited events in the Philippine collegiate sports season.

Philippine collegiate basketball consists of diverse inter-school competitions that are best represented by competitions organized by the Universities Athletics Association of the Philippines (UAAP) and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). The difference between the UAAP and the NCAA lies in its governance structure (Riego 2015). The NCAA is a governing body for college athletics wherein the Philippine Commission on Higher Education (CHED 2006) defines a college as “an institution of higher learning offering academic programs and usually pre-professional training leading to a bachelor’s degree.” The UAAP is a governing body for university athletics wherein a university is defined as “an entire socio-physical infrastructure comprised of schools, colleges, and institutes offering degree programs in various disciplines in all levels” (ibid.).

The UAAP was founded in 1938 by four universities: namely, the Far Eastern University (FEU), National University (NU), the University of the Philippines (UP), and the University of Santo Thomas (UST). It is a sports association of eight Manila-based universities competing in fifteen sports (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, August 31, 2019; UAAP 2020). Basketball is a mandatory sport in the UAAP championship and is divided between the men’s, women’s, and junior (high school) divisions. As the focus of this paper is on the men’s division, reference is made to the eight teams represented by the Adamson University or AU’s Soaring Falcons, Ateneo de Manila University or ADMU’s Blue Eagles, De La Salle University-Manila or DLSU’s Green Archers, FEU’s Tamaraws, NU’s Bulldogs, University of the East or UE’s Red Warriors, UP-Diliman’s Fighting Maroons, and UST’s Growling Tigers. On the other hand, the NCAA is an intercollegiate championship much older than the UAAP having been established in 1924 by seven founding schools namely, UP, UST, ADMU, DLSU, NU, San Beda College, and FEU (formerly the Institute of Accounts, Business, and Finance) (Malonso 2011). Among the original members of the NCAA, only San Beda College remains in this intercollegiate championship (Riego 2015). Similar to the UAAP, teams in the NCAA are mostly Manila-based and currently include the following with reference to the men’s division: Arellano University’s Chiefs, Colegio de San Juan de Letran’s Knights, De La Salle College of Saint Benilde’s Blazers, Emilio Aguinaldo College’s Generals, Jose Rizal University or JRU’s Heavy Bombers, Lyceum of the Philippines University’s Pirates,

Mapua University Manila's Cardinals, San Beda College's Red Lions, San Sebastian College's Stags, University of Perpetual Help System Dalta's Altas (ibid.).

The contemporary popularity of basketball in the Philippines is attributed to its mediatization, referencing "the influence of media institutions and practices on other fields of social and institutional practice" (Livingston and Lunt 2014, 705). Bautista (2017) reflects such mediatization in the UAAP noting that it "is arguably the most profitable franchise today on Philippine TV, with big ratings and advertising spots for everything from a good pass on the hardcourt to a group of students on the bleachers cheering for their peers." According to a nationwide survey undertaken in 2012 by Kantar Media, UAAP basketball games enjoyed an average viewership of 124,690, a rating 151 percent higher than the NCAA's average of 51,580 viewers per game (*ABS-CBN News*, September 28, 2012). In 2018, the sports franchise generated \$ 1.32 billion in national TV advertisement revenues, a number that has been steadily increasing by 3 to 5 percent each year (Kantar Media 2018).

Mediatization can occur directly when "media partly or completely substitute social activities and social institutions and thus change their character" (Schulz 2004, 23). It can happen indirectly "when a given activity is increasingly influenced with respect to form, content or organization by mediagenic symbols or mechanisms" (Hjavarud 2008, 115). The mediatization of basketball in the Philippines is attributed to what Antolihao (2012) terms the "Hollywoodization of hoops," referencing the global media popularity of the National Basketball Association (NBA) as a key component of American popular culture that in effect made basketball develop into an avenue for social mobility and serve as a bridge connecting the various social classes in the Philippines.

Antolihao (2009) notes three key characteristics that have sustained the mass appeal of basketball in the Philippines: 1) the attempt to replicate the NBA in the Philippines resulting in the establishment of the Philippine Basketball Association (PBA), the first professional basketball league in Asia; 2) the increasing influence of mass media in the form of television and radio, which in effect allowed the PBA to expand into a multifaceted entertainment enterprise (Iñigo 2008); and 3) the evolution of the PBA into a mass media spectacle that resulted in the rise of local sports celebrities. Overall, these trends turned the Philippines into one of the few "basketball republics" in the world (Antolihao 2012). Through this culture industry, the visibility of Blacks became evident as players

of African American descent were recruited to play for teams in the PBA. The same effect trickled into collegiate basketball where Bartholomew (2010, 285) posits that “[n]ew technology and niche media markets contributed to a more plausible explanation for college basketball’s . . . prominence” in the country. Later on, college teams, like those in the PBA, started recruiting “even players without any Filipino blood . . . and a host of other import-slash-students from Australia, Eastern Europe, and various African nations” (ibid.).

In this culture industry, students from Africa have become a key feature in Philippine collegiate basketball. They are said to have caught the public’s consciousness in the mid-1990s when Nigerian Sam Ekwe led the San Beda College Red Lions to the NCAA title after a two-decade drought by the school (PCCL 2013). Since then, a number of Africans have been featured in both the NCAA and the UAAP championships. Some of these players include Karim Abdul (UST-Manila); Ingrid Sewa (AU); Emmanuel Mbe and Alfred Aroga (NU); Ben Mbala (South Western University, SWU-Cebu, and later with the DLSU-Manila); Landry Sanjo and Fabrice Siewe (SWU-Cebu); Mike Nzeusseu (University of the Visayas-UV); Charles Mammie (UE); and Ola Adeogun (San Beda College, Manila).¹

Cameroonian Emanuel Benoit “Ben” Mbala of the DLSU Green Archers made a considerable impact in aiding the Green Archers to consecutive UAAP Finals appearances (*ABS-CBN News*, December 22, 2017). Two years before Ben Mbala made his presence at DLSU, there was Alfred Aroga who played a major role in ending the longest drought for the NU Bulldogs in UAAP history when they won the 2014 championship. The 6’7 Alfred Aroga was named the Finals’ Most Valuable Player (MVP) that season.² The six-foot Cameroonian John Njei boosted the JRU Heavy Bombers’ offensive and defensive efforts from 2008 to 2010, nearly upsetting the Sam Ekwe-led San Beda Red Lions in the finals on his first year. Another was the 6’7 Cameroonian Emmanuel Mbe who began his collegiate career with Emilio Aguinaldo College during its pre-NCAA days in 2008 and before making his UAAP debut for the NU Bulldogs in 2010. Mbe helped the NU Bulldogs reach the UAAP Final Four in 2012 and 2013 respectively. Another fellow Cameroonian, 6’6 Karim Abdul, played five UAAP seasons for the UST Growling Tigers transforming the Tigers into a winning outfit having reached the UAAP finals in 2012 and 2013 while winning three Mythical Five awards.^{3,4} The third foreign-born player tapped by San Beda, Nigerian Ola Adeogun, capped off the Red Lions’ five-peat by winning the last

three from 2012 to 2014, taking off from where Ekwe left. The 6'8 Nigerian Sam Ekwe was a consistent performer who kept San Beda's winning tradition intact (Velasco 2017).

Despite their athletic performances for their respective schools, African student athletes have become polarizing figures. Their presence and on-field dominance have sparked debates in public discourse. On one hand, there is a contention that these African student athletes have been beneficial to the progress of Philippine collegiate basketball in the form of enhanced competitiveness. On the other hand, others argue that such recruitments have hindered the development of home-based local players who have their own ambitions (Verora 2018). Critiques point to an allegation that aspiring athletes from Africa, most of whom are from Nigeria, Sudan, Cameroon, and Congo, are reportedly hoping to get free education and livelihood in the Philippines by "trading off their size and physical strength" (ibid.). A strong point of argument is the professional contract that Ben Mbala received from Fuerza Regia de Monterrey for the top Mexican professional basketball league, the Liga Nacional de Baloncesto Profesional, at the expense of his studies (Agcaoili 2017). Critics against African student athletes in Philippine collegiate basketball further allege that the deliberate recruitment of these athletes is specifically done to "boost [school] line-ups in need of a dominating center or power" (Sarmenta 2016).

Attesting to Paul Gilroy's (1993) privileging of the Black subject in his seminal work in *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, both African Americans and African students have been acknowledged for transforming the sport in the Philippines in both PBA and collegiate basketball competitions, respectively. Gilroy saw the Black subject as a modern citizen who takes an active agentic role as producers of a counterculture within American popular culture. In the case of music in North America, Blacks became the major producers and cultural bearers of American popular culture. In effect, they had to be recognized as citizens rather than subjects. This role plays out as well in the Philippine basketball context where African American professional athletes are accredited with modernizing the game in the local league (Antolihao 2012).

Billy Ray Bates, who is known in the Philippines as the "Black Superman," is credited for revolutionizing the Philippine game. He showed "fans and players moves they'd never imagined, and for that he will always be the Black Superman" (Bartholomew 2010, 154). Bartholomew adds that Billy Ray Bates was probably the closest most Filipinos ever came to seeing Michael Jordan or Julius Erving in

person, bringing “the Jordan brand of high-flying, acrobatic basketball to the Philippines two years before Jordan perfected it in the NBA” (137). Another notable African American figure is Norman Black who stayed “in Manila to help implement the transformation of local basketball that Bates inspired” (154). Black became known as “Mr. 100 Percent” throughout his ten-year playing career in the PBA. He became the first American player named to the PBA Hall of Fame in 2007 and even chose to stay in the Philippines having received coaching opportunities for both the PBA and ADMU in the UAAP.

Some African Americans have also become naturalized Filipinos and thus eligible to play for the Philippine national basketball team, which further attests to Gilroy’s thesis of the Black becoming a citizen. These include Andray Blatche who played for the Brooklyn Nets and Washington Wizards in the NBA, and Marcus Douthit who played for the Los Angeles Lakers and Los Angeles Clippers also in the NBA. At the collegiate level, African students have equally played this agentic function where their role is deemed to have contributed to the progress of collegiate basketball through the transfer of skills (PCCL 2013). The case of Nigerian Ola Adeogun who played for San Beda’s Red Lions, equally illustrates Gilroy’s thesis:

The San Beda community adores him. He has suited up for the PBA D-League. In late 2015, Adeogun even represented the Philippines in a 3x3 exhibition game, and while that isn’t really [an] international competition, Adeogun felt it was fitting for him to be able to do that. It felt more of an achievement for him to be able to don a Philippines [national team] jersey, the country that gave him an avenue to play basketball in the first place.⁵ (Verora 2018)

However, Verora (2018) also highlights the hypocrisy in the treatment of African American basketball players, especially those continental Africans in collegiate basketball.

It’s no secret how much obsessed Filipinos are with hoops, and they have welcomed pretty much every NBA player who graces various events with open arms. Which makes the long-standing local clamor to ban foreigners from playing in collegiate tournaments in the Philippines quite an ironic idea. It is predicated on the belief that having them here takes away slots from equally hardworking locals.

To complement this hypocrisy, the media scripting of African student athletes through the deployment of a white frame illustrates how racial stereotypes literally play out to “other” these students. In this regard, I argue that employing racist ideology in media scripts and in practices that “other” African student athletes is structured in the politics of nationalism that intersects with gender (hypermasculinity) and the commercialization of the sport.

MEDIA SCRIPTING AND THE “OTHERING” OF BLACK STUDENT ATHLETES

A thematic construction of illustrative media representations of African student athletes in Philippine collegiate basketball have come to reinforce what John Hoberman (2007)—a social and cultural historian who has researched and published extensively in the fields of sports studies, race studies, human enhancements, medical history, and globalization studies—notes are certain racialized scripts that subject the bodies of Black athletes to disciplinary scrutiny as presented next.

1. African Brawn (Agence France-Presse 2017; emphasis added):

“He’s a big (forward) who can run, **he’s fast, he’s agile, physically strong and mentally he’s sharp**, and he has a good attitude,” [Ben Mbala’s DLSU] coach, Aldin Ayo, told AFP.

2. The Brute (Sarmenta 2016; emphasis added):

Over the last decade, **tall and beefy** players mostly from Africa, have enrolled as student-athletes to boost lineups in need of a dominating center or power forward.

...

The **size and dominance** of the Africans in our college game is **jarring** for those accustomed to watching **graceful, high-flying and sharp shooting** Filipino players.

3. Low Intellect (ibid.; emphasis added):

Some players begin with **very limited basketball know-how** and end up being **schooled by patient Filipino coaches**. They improve and sharpen skills **beyond snaring rebounds or clogging the lane**.

4. From the Jungle (Mendoza 2016; emphasis added):

The Archers did not **spear** Mbala in Africa. No. They **snared** him in Cebu, where he was enrolled in a university there.

The thematic representations of Black African physicality in Philippine media tend to orient heavily around rhetoric of the “animalistic” representations of the black male body that have “long been the site of white fascination, consumption, and fear” (Guzzio 2005, 223–24).

According to sports sociologist Gary Sailes (1993), the following are long-held Western theories that are largely informed by the ideology of the White gaze: The Mandingo theory postulates that blacks are physically advanced because of some genetic predisposition that is traced to selective breeding that occurred on the White plantations of the American South during slavery leading to Africans’ genetic predisposition to being physically larger and stronger. Thus, the Mandingo Theory holds that Black athletes in America were descendants of physically strong slaves (Sailes 1993). This theory links with the Genetic theory that perceives Africans as having more white twitch muscle that enables an increase in speed. As such, Western-propagated “scientific racist” myths regarding natural black athleticism underpin the institutional routine of transferring black students into sporting competitions rather than academic subjects (Cashmore 1982, 98). This theme also relates to another of Sailes’s (1993) racial typology based on Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray’s (1994) work *The Bell Curve*, which held the presumption that racial and ethnic groups could be hierarchically ranked in terms of their Intelligence Quotient (IQ) with African Americans at the bottom. The Bell Curve theory argues that Africans should further their athleticism to compensate for their genetically determined weaker intellect, whereas the Dumb Jock theory postulates that Africans enter further education as athletes and cannot match non-

athletes academically (Sailes 1993). According to Coakley (1990, 46), the origin of the Dumb Jock stereotype is traced to the criticism ancient Greek athletes would receive for spending a considerable amount of time preparing for competitions at the expense of intellectual development. They were thus characterized by some philosophers of the period “as useless and ignorant citizens with dull minds.”

The Black athletic body in Philippine collegiate sports recalls Fanon’s (1967, 140) metaphoric illustration of the Black man becoming an object of voyeurism where “the people in the theatre are watching me, examining me, waiting for me.” In this scene, the Black viewing subject becomes the object looked at and interpolated into a system of representations. As Fanon wrote on anti-Black racism, the White gaze constructs the Black body into an object “in the midst of other objects” (ibid., 109). Reduced to an object, the Black person’s darkness, which according to George Yancy (2017) is a naturally occurring phenomenon, became historicized based on a racial epidermal schema residing within the purview of the White gaze. Fanon’s racial epidermal schema translates into a racial muscular schema in Filipino media narratives on African student athletes, which in turn reinforces a racist ideology that seems to profess specific kinds of meanings on Black people.

In the context of the Philippines, the illustrative media scripts situate the Black subject (the athlete) as an object to be looked at and interpolated into a system of (stereotyped) representation by deploying the White gaze. These scripts inadvertently extend a stereotypical impression of continental Africans on a race-logic grounded in White-held imperialist theories (Sailes 1993), notably the Mandingo theory. This speaks of centuries of colonial history and the positioning of the non-White body vis-à-vis the colonizer’s body as the “other.” In this regard, representations of black physicality in Philippine media coverage of collegiate sports have seemingly become normalized “representations of events relating to race that have premises inscribed into them as a set of unquestionable assumptions” (Hall 1990, 13).

Thus, normalizing ideologies of black sporting bodies are unnatural (de B’béri and Hogarth 2009). Rather, these are forms of racism that are manifested as accepted truths in sports dialogue and unveils systemic behaviors constructed within specific systems of representation guided by the White gaze. Here, the White gaze is not passive; instead it relies on what Barthes (1999, 22) called a “historical grammar.” This historical grammar is the existence of

a repository of stereotyped attitudes that not only forms the basis of signification but also applies meaning to the hypervisible black bodies that it gazes upon, thus affixing meaning to them in the public arena through the processes of representation. As Mignolo (2009, 19) opines, “racism as we sense it today, was the result of . . . conceptual inventions of imperial knowledge” that are a product of Western master frames or cosmologies, which tend to mainstream Western theory and findings as the scholarly “core.” This stratification in knowledge production leads to Western perspectives, interests, and sensitivities normalized as “general theory” and used as lenses in other geographical spaces such as in the media scripting of African student athletes in the Philippines.

However, as Bonilla-Silva (2003, 469) contends, racist ideologies are not “free-floating”; rather, they have structural foundations that involve some form of hierarchy that produces definite social relations between the races. This is evident in rationalized processes of exclusion in the planned ban of foreign students in sporting events of Philippine collegiate tournaments beginning in Season 96 of the academic year of 2020–2021. The exceptions to this rule are Filipino-foreigners locally referred to as “Fil-foreigners” or those who are mixed-race Filipinos most of whom are from the diaspora. Their inclusion in future collegiate competitions at the expense of African students is argued on the basis that they (Fil-foreigners) can be part of the pool for selection in the national team and that they can presumably assimilate into Philippine society. The planned exclusion of Black African student athletes in future Philippine collegiate events alludes to Yancy’s (2008, 4) metaphoric reference of a process that “confiscates the Black body within social spaces of meaning construction” by marking the black body as dangerous. In Fanon’s (1967) conceptualization, the Black body becomes the other that requires its control, if not annihilation. In this regard, the next section of the paper departs from Bonilla-Silva’s (2003) point in critically discussing the racist ideologies in media scripting of African student athletes and in practices of exclusion within unequal social relations.

DISCUSSION

The deployment of the White gaze in media scripts on Black African student athletes in Philippine collegiate sports puts to play Frantz Fanon’s (2006, 122) contention that “there is one expression that through time has become singularly eroticized: the black athlete.”

Thus, stereotype media scripts of Black African athletes in Philippine collegiate basketball are not the product of individual awareness but rather, are influenced in part by an inescapable framework of a colonial ideology reflected by the deployment of the White gaze on non-White bodies. As Quijano (2000, 533) opines, “the racial axis has a colonial origin and character” unknown before colonization.

In the Philippine context, “black skin” was present in the form of the indigenous Aeta, which was only made “visible” by subsequent colonial social systems of the Spanish and Americans. Among the indigenous Aeta, who perceive themselves as *ang unang Pilipino* (the original Filipino), their conceptualization of “race” was based on bloodline (*lahi*) whereas the racial/ethnic binary with the Malay was based on a difference in hair texture and not skin color (Sy 2016), that is, between *Kulot* (curly) and *Unat* (stretched). With the advent of Spanish colonial administration in the Philippines in the nineteenth century, a policy of divisiveness promoted and encouraged regional isolation and ethnic distinctions. Distinction was thus made between those of Spanish descent who were in authority and power—the *Insulares* or those of Spanish descent born in the Philippines and the full-blooded Spanish-born in the Iberian Peninsula (*peninsulares*)—and the rest of the population of the colony. When the US military occupied the Philippine islands, they, like the Spanish before them, installed a racist social arrangement that further reinforced the alienation of Filipinos (Ngozi-Brown 1997). This is best exemplified in the introduction of physical education in the school program that Antolihao (2009, 62) opines was meant to affirm the colonial American racial ideology in projecting the Filipinos as a “weak race.” As Kramer (2006, 2) contends, the distinctive bodily attributes of the locals (Filipinos) became an integral aspect of the “racial politics of [the American] empire,” referring to the ways in which the racial hierarchical structure was generated and mobilized in order to legitimate and organize the colonial administration in the Philippines.

Feagin (2014, 8) therefore argues that “European colonialism and imperialism . . . reached much of the globe and created a global racial order, which has had severe consequences for the world’s peoples for centuries.” This included the propagation of Eurocentrism defined as “an ideology or body of myths, symbols, ideas, and practices that exclusively or predominantly values the worldview and cultural manifestations (e.g., history, politics, art, language, music literature, technology, economics, etc.) of people of European origin, and denigrates and subordinates the cultural manifestations of people

from all other lands of origin” (Swartz 1992, 342). Thus, a colonial legacy of Eurocentrism tends to be reproduced through sports media as a master script, which by large disregards the contributions of those outside of the European narrative and which therefore comes to legitimize some knowledge while simultaneously denying the knowledge of other groups (Apple and Christian-Smith 1991).

As earlier mentioned, Bonilla-Silva (1997) contends that racist ideologies are rather structured. At the cultural level, relations between Filipino and Blacks can be termed as cordial, tracing it back to the period of American colonialism in the Philippines. Ngozi-Brown (1997) posits that the fates of both African Americans and Filipinos during the American imperial era in the Philippines were bound by their common disenfranchisement where neither was regarded to be capable of self-determination nor possessed a sufficient coercive apparatus to challenge the hegemony of the imperial powers. Espiritu (2003, 52–53) aptly captures this common cause:

... white American soldiers in the Philippines used many of the same epithets to describe Filipinos as they used to describe African Americans, including “niggers,” “black devils,” and “gugus.”

...

If we positioned Filipino/American history within the traditional immigration paradigm, we would miss the ethnic and racial intersections between Filipinos and Native Americans and African Americans as groups similarly affected by the forces of [the] Manifest Destiny. These common contexts of struggle were not lost in African American soldiers in the Philippines. Connecting their fight against domestic racism to the Filipino struggle against U.S. imperialism, some African American soldiers—such as Corporal David Fagen—switched allegiance and joined the native armed struggle for independence.

However, in collegiate basketball, there is a distinct relationship between Filipinos and Africans. An explanation for the fractured nature of relations with Africans can be done in relation to the homosocial space of basketball as a site for the production of hypermasculinity. This masculine space was historically created by taking the sport away from its initial focus on women. At its inception, basketball in the Philippines was introduced in the

educational system as a women's sport essentially to enhance their education and health in order to meet the stereotype of the "ideal white American woman [as] nurturers of civilization" (Halili 2006, 186). In later years, basketball became the interlocutor of an emerging hegemonic male in Philippine culture largely due to the Young Men's Christian Association's (YMCA) "play for all program," which was initially established as a school-based physical education program after the arrival of Elwood S. Brown in 1910 as the first Physical Director of the Philippine YMCA (Antolihao 2010, 69).

As Bryson (1987) notes, sports is a crucial arena in which masculinity is constructed and reconstructed in such a way that it in turn directly supports male dominance by associating males and maleness with valued skills and the sanctioned use of aggression, force, violence. Men in Philippine society are encouraged to prove and practice their power and virility, such that being a man has stereotypically been associated with overcoming obstacles, losing one's virginity at a young age, and having a "healthy" libido (De Castro 1995). In this regard, Bartholomew (2010) illustrates how basketball teaches Filipino adolescents masculine virtues such as teamwork and aggression. The basketball court then becomes a site in which such forms of masculinity are performed. Lizada (2015) illustrates these masculinized narratives in the psyche of Filipinos exemplified by the ADMU and DLSU basketball rivalries that have sustained an imaginary imagery of the alpha Filipino male. Another study by Rubio and Green (2011) explored how Filipino men involved in sports in the Philippines reproduced hegemonic constructs of masculinity and gender roles that reflected the "dominator" image of the Filipino male (Aguiling-Dalisay et al. 2000). Thus, questions of race, gender, and sexuality in Philippine collegiate basketball become intertwined in a broader discourse on hypermasculine performances that are in turn central to competitive televised sport.

Sung (2010) illustrates how the NBA in America perpetuates the image of the hypermasculine Black athlete as aggressive, violent, animalistic, and misogynistic—a packaging of masculinity that generates profit for the NBA franchise. In this regard, Messner, Dunbar, and Hunt (2000, 385) conclude that promoting the "Televised Manhood Formula" is profitable. Thus, the homosocial space of Philippine basketball is a site in which Filipino masculinity is performed and in turn feeds on the fetishism of Filipino masculine virility (Deville 2013). However, the display of Filipino masculinity is threatened by the dominance of African student athletes requiring

in turn the latter's "control" by placing them in a subordinate racial position through racialized scripts and othering practices.

At the political level, Weiner (2012) contends that globalization and nationalist resurgences in the postcolonial era have only entrenched the deeply embedded nature of race, where the privileges available to powerful racial groups have a devastating consequence for others. Globalization has transformed modern sports marked in part by the commodification of (athletic) labor and the resultant scouting for sporting talents from around the world. This phenomenon has witnessed a trend in the international migration of athletes in their efforts to commodify labor power (Agozino 1996), a phenomenon which Andreff (2001) refers to as "muscle drain."

The migration of athletic talents from many low income countries has nonetheless witnessed a reversal of (exploitative) power in terms of the rise of individual superstars "who are bought by rich clubs [and colleges] from poor countries, but also in terms of poor countries that beat rich countries at 'their own' game" (Agozino 1996, 169). This reversal of power has in turn led to the surveillance of the subject population either in the form of visual supervision in a Foucauldian (1977) understanding or in the use of what Giddens (1991, 15) notes as "the use of information to coordinate social activities." The resultant effect of such surveillance is the "systematic exclusion of the poor, women and ethnic minorities from many sports contests in so many parts of the world, either by direct marginalization or by indirect obstruction of their opportunities" (Agozino 1996, 173). As illustrated in this paper, such exclusionary practices are evident in the planned ban on foreign African athletes in future collegiate sports in the Philippines. Such exclusionary practices therefore contradict Ashworth's (1971, 45) metaphorical view of modern sports as an equalizer of differences, a symbolic marker of equality in which "strict formal rules that make 'extra-ability' factors equal for everyone."

Nationalist tendencies further limit options and opportunities for non-nationals based on real, perceived, or ascribed physical or cultural characteristics, what Huntington (2005) calls racial nationalism. As Glenn (2011) opines, democratic nations espousing civic nationalism may exclude groups using essentialized or primordial physical or cultural differences that impede full social, political, and civic citizenship. Writing in the context of soccer in the UK, Mason (1980) notes the efforts to safeguard white supremacy in sports by improving the moral and physical qualities of white men who play or watch the game; while on the other hand, ethnic minorities, mostly

black soccer players, had to contest against prejudicial hostilities “from fans and even from team-mates, club officials and sports officials” (Agozino 1996,173). As Hornby (1992) opines in this regard, black players are often in trouble for simply being black. It is therefore the content of Agozino (1996, 179) that “the macho perception of black players (male and sometimes female ones too) is racialized and gendered and might lead to victimization in the field of sports.” Hence, the planned exclusion of foreign, mostly African student athletes in future Philippine collegiate sports is manifest of exclusionary nationalistic practices that create perceptions of “them” and “us.” This form of hierarchical relations is noted by Verora (2018) who links basketball in the Philippines to a symbolic nationalistic articulation needing protection from external threats.

Many foreigners have also suited up for schools to play other sports, so I am convinced that to a certain degree, why this entire thing is even an issue is because this is basketball, the sport Filipinos oh-so love and adore.

This comment aligns with what former national men’s basketball team coach, Vincent “Chot” Reyes, uttered in the aftermath of finishing as a runner-up at the 27th FIBA Asia Championship in 2013. Reyes was quoted as saying the following:

“What has a bad effect on the future generation of big men is the UAAP and NCAA’s practice of allowing all these Africans.”

“I think that should stop,” he stressed. “All the UAAP, NCAA and college teams having one or two Africans, that’s gonna hurt the local big men.” (Naredo 2013)

Comments by Verora (2018) and Coach Reyes hold a certain kind of (right wing) nationalism where the focus is to promote Filipino basketball talents rather than promote the prospects of non-Filipinos, notably African athletes.

At the economic level, Antolihao (2009) outlines the commercial success of collegiate basketball in the Philippines by noting that the commercialization of the NCAA and the UAAP basketball games was akin to that in the US where the development of interscholastic leagues successfully expanded the fan base and media coverage of the collegiate tournaments. Antolihao (2009) posits that the

commercialization of collegiate basketball in the Philippines also includes the entry of corporate sponsorship, the marketing of varsity apparel, and the rise of some college athletes as entertainment celebrities. In addition, many university teams now hire high-profile coaches who have professional experience and are known for their aggressive recruitment of talented players locally and from overseas. These overseas players include those from Africa (Antolihao 2009), whom Sarmenta scripts as “tall and beefy” players (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, October 18, 2016). It is in the commercialization of the collegiate sport in the Philippines that Hawkins (2010, 69) refers to in his book, *The New Plantation*, where capital accumulates in predominantly non-black institutions due to the “unfortunate” athletic performances of Black athletes.

As Hawkins (2010) observes in the US context, Black athletes have been given the charge of creating and maintaining an institution’s athletic tradition, and bringing fortune and fame to the school and community with the possibility of receiving an education. It is in this “New Plantation” that the White gaze returns to in the form of media scripts and exclusionary practices. The commercially influenced recruitment of African student athletes is reminiscent of what William Rhoden (2006, 178) refers to as the conveyor belt where “young athletes quickly learn that easy passage through a white-controlled system is contingent upon not ‘rocking the boat,’ not being a ‘troublemaker,’ and making those in positions of power feel comfortable with the athletes’ blackness.” This “conveyor” system is aptly illustrated in Philippine collegiate basketball.

They easily stand out due to their physique, appearance, names and of course, skill and talent. Hence, they are usually at the forefront of the campaign of colleges and universities to dominate the opposition and capture one tournament championship after another. They are the muscle-bound, athletically gifted behemoths lured from halfway around the world in Africa to the sizzling basketball competitions of the UAAP, NCAA, CESAFI in Cebu and other collegiate basketball hotbeds in the country.⁶ (PCCL 2013)

According to sports sociologist Mary McDonald (2005, 248), the commodification of athletes in the sports-industry complex provides “sanitized snapshots that promote integration without equality, representation without power, [and] presence without the confirming

possibility of emancipation.” In effect, there is the creation of what Rhoden (2006) metaphorically refers to as “Forty Million Dollar Slaves” in a book of the same title in which the massive financial amounts paid to many Black athletes do not correlate with the equal power relationship reminiscent of what was established in eighteenth century slave plantations. Hawkins (2010, 41) gives a background of this and constructs a new plantation model to illustrate “the structural arrangements of predominantly White institutions as it relates to Black athletes.” In this “New Plantation” system are arrangements that Hawkins (2010, 43) refers to as “internal colonization,” a situation in which a “minority, indigenous or transplanted [individual], is subjugated and exploited by the dominant majority colonizer.” Hawkins therefore relates the theory of mutual dependence to the relationship between recruited Black athletes and their respective schools “because intercollegiate athletic departments heavily depend on Black athletic talent to generate revenue for their multimillion dollar athletic budget” (45), while the athlete gets an education or a chance for a professional career. In this perspective, Henry Liao scripts the African student athlete in the Philippines within such mutual arrangements.

Most of them are of African variety—from Nigeria to Cameroon to Sierra Leone, to Congo (the former Zaire) to Ghana—for the simple reason that they are as athletic as African-Americans but come in cheaper in recruitment payoffs to sports agents and monthly allowances to players [*sic*].

Regardless, the foreign recruits are paid handsomely, if not royally. There’s free tuition and tutorship, a rented condo unit, a high-end vehicle for their transport, tutorship for the academically-challenged and, of course, a monthly allowance. All these benefits are courtesy of the rich businessmen among their alumni communities.

...

In the local setting, foreign student-athletes are expected to come in with the mind-set of being a student firstly and an athlete secondly [*sic*].

Alas, some have come aboard primarily to play basketball (their height is a giveaway) and only look to study when there is a full moon. (*Bandera*, July 24, 2014)

Critics against the recruitment and preferential treatment accorded to African student athletes complain that the Philippines (and local Filipino cagers⁷) get nothing out of this exchange aside from a championship for a school at season's end. These critics exhibit social emotions that border on both fear and fantasy of African student athletes. This is especially the case for Ben Mbala who was awarded his second MVP last 2017, Season 80.

Mbala, like past Africans before him, will also gobble up, together with his fellow Africans from the other African-dependent schools, the playing time of Filipinos displaced by Africans. . . . It's even [worse] at UAAP: Africans there are forever while NCAA will ban Africans by 2019. (Mendoza 2016)

"[Cameroonian] Ben [Mbala] deserves that MVP but there should be an MVP for local players and Imports in the NCAA & UAAP. . . Really unfair for the locals," tweeted [a local Filipino student-athlete,] Kobe Paras, who will play for Cal State-Northridge, last November 28. (Li 2017)

It is in such a structural mutual arrangement that Hawkins (2010, 85) provides the concept of the "New Plantation" as an "economic analogy of the [slavery] plantation system and intercollegiate athletics." The "New Plantation," now represented by the organization of the game of collegiate basketball in contexts like the Philippines, is therefore significantly structured by capital that in effect creates what Rhoden (2006) metaphorically refers to as the "Jockey Syndrome" in which persons in authority (in this case Filipinos as opposed to Whites) use their (financial) power to change the rules of engagement in spaces that Blacks begin to dominate. Rhoden (2006) notes that this syndrome is distinguished by a changing of the rules of the game via a series of maneuvers to facilitate racist outcomes, including the taking away of previously granted rights and the diluting of access through coercive power and force. Therefore, altering participation rules to exclude foreign, mostly Black African student athletes in future collegiate basketball tournaments in the Philippines is reflective of the Jockey Syndrome.

In the racialized media scripting and othering practices on African student athletes in the Philippines, one notes a silence to what Yogita Goyal (2014) notes is the place of Africa in the

counterculture of modernity as espoused by Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* (1993), a silence that renders Africa as anterior to modernity. This aspect is well captured in media scripts in the Philippine context where the influx of African students to the country "fits" the grand narrative of "escaping poverty" from Africa and in gaining from the advanced and modern level of basketball in the Philippines, which in turn defines the underdevelopment of the sport in Africa. As Verona (2018) notes, "every African basketball player dreams of making the NBA, but for those who have long accepted that [this] goal may not be realistic, the Philippines is a premium second option and a haven to fulfil hoop dreams."

Goyal (2014, x) contends that diaspora studies should apply the lens of geopolitics and biopolitics in a neoliberal world in order to better comprehend the play of power and the relation of social belonging by situating these within "globalizing notions of race." Goyal's argument seeks to locate anti-Black racism within the intersection of neoliberalism, including gender and sexuality as "essential and vital categories that disrupt seamless construction of a stable vision of the African diaspora" (2014, xx). Doing this extends the frame of the "black Atlantic" beyond the scope of the movement of ideas, peoples, and objects between Britain and the US—something which this paper attempts in situating anti-Black racism in Philippine collegiate sports. It has attempted to widen the scope of the "black Atlantic" by redefining and pushing the boundaries of blackness in the Philippines by centering the significance of sports alongside race in accounts of nation and diaspora. This task of extending the black Atlantic in the wider geographical space reflects Idris Ali's⁸ (1993) novel, *Dongola: A Nubian Novel*, which Goyal notes urges scholars to stretch and reshape the boundaries of blackness in the Arab world.

As Mbembe and Nuttall (2004, 348) remind us, "Africa as a name, as an idea, and as an object of academic and public discourse has been, and remains, fraught." Africa needs to be reclaimed in new spaces such as the Philippines where African voices can be heard while dispelling some of the central categories in cultural studies, notably subject, nation, history, and space, which are usually formed in White frames and only applied to the African/Black Other. Such a discourse would move away from what Gikandi (1996) opines as Gilroy's (1993) bracketing of Africa from the vibrant discussions about the black Atlantic by pointing to a discourse that firmly aligns Africa with that of the black Atlantic. Such an expanded reading of Africa in other spaces aligns with Richard Giulianotti (2005), a

professor of sociology at Loughborough University, UK, who notes that much of the sociological reading of racism within sports needs to broaden its geographic and epistemological remittances given that much of sports sociology on race retraces the mercantile era of Atlantic slave trade.

The vast geographical and social expanses of Africa, Latin America, peripheral Europe (south and eastern), and I add Asia remain insufficiently examined. As outlined by Goyal (2014) and Gikandi (1996) alike, there is a need for deeper reflection upon the ontological roots of racism as covertly scripted, by isolating it from other collectives of systematic intolerance and prejudicial treatment toward people of color in various spheres of life and events, such as awards and honors in sports, restrictions and bans imposed in leagues and competitions, and stacking positions in games—the latter which sports sociologist Wilbert Marcellus Leonard (1986) refers to as the disproportional relegation of athletes to specific sports positions on the basis of ascribed characteristics such as ethnicity or race, which is a discriminatory process in the social world of sports. In this regard, Giulianotti (2005, 79) argues that “there is a need to confront the nature of race logic *per se* if we are to develop a robust, normative redefinition of sport as a cultural field free of racism, prejudice and ethnic intolerance.”

CONCLUSION

This paper has sought to show that practices of representation of Black athletic bodies in the twenty-first century continue to recycle specific ideological *énoncés* that reproduce them into a new set of discursive enunciations that are represented as normalized and socially naturalized common sense (de B'éri and Hogart 2009). Such racialized ideologies are grounded in a new racism that reflects the covert nature of racialized perceptions of “them” and “us” that have come to crystalize racial notions and stereotypes. By moving away from explanations of anti-Blackness in Philippine media scripts and in othering practices against African student athletes using the White gaze, the paper essentially draws on Hall's (1980) notion of race as a discursive system by situating it in everyday social and economic relations. This notion aligns with Bonilla-Silva's (1997, 469) conceptualization of perceived normalized outcomes of racial contestations as situated in a racialized social system in which

“economic, social, political, or ideological rewards or penalties received by social actors for their participation (whether willing, unwilling, or indifferent) are organized in social structural arrangements.” Thus, representations of Black African student athletes in Philippine collegiate sports can be done “without being imprisoned in [the White gaze’s] instrumentality, or even its conceptual logic” as argued by Gikandi (1996, 3). As opined by Hawkins (2010), racialized discourses can only be challenged once we begin to recognize and deconstruct the normalizing power inscribed, for instance, in the spectacle of the black athletic body in sporting arrangements as an outcome of structured racialized systems in the Global South context. In this regard, there is a need to heed Weiner’s (2012) call on scholars to interrogate contemporary forms of race relations not by reference to a long-distant colonial past “but in relation to its contemporary structure organized around hierarchical relations between the races in those systems” (Bonilla-Silva 1997, 476).

NOTES

- 1 See Levi Joshua Verora, 2018, “In Basketball-Crazy Philippines, Africans Live Their Hoop Dreams,” Medium (blog), February, accessed October 10, 2019, <https://medium.com/@leviverorajr/in-basketball-crazy-philippines-africans-live-their-hoop-dreams-4ce7085ca564>.
- 2 See Ned Toledo, “16 Memorable Imports in the Collegiate Ranks,” accessed August 20, 2019, <https://www.fhm.com.ph/pop-culture/sports/16-memorable-imports-in-the-collegiate-ranks-a1548-20170902-lfrm> (site discontinued).
- 3 The Mythical Five is a concept adopted from the Philippine Basketball Association (PBA) where an annual role of honor is given to the best player for each of the following basketball positions: point guard, shooting guard, small forward, power forward, and center (De Leon 2013).
- 4 See Toledo, “16 Memorable Imports in The Collegiate Ranks.”
- 5 The Philippine Basketball Association (PBA) Developmental League or PBA D-League is “the PBA’s official minor league basketball organization.” The League includes private sponsored corporate teams as well as collegiate teams (*The Manila Times*, January 5, 2016).
- 6 CESAFI is an acronym referring to the Cebu Schools Athletic Foundation, Inc. It is a sports association of twelve schools, colleges, and universities in Cebu in the Central Visayas region of the Philippines. CESAFI is the equivalent of the Luzon based UAAP and NCAA. It was established in 2001 (Pages 2011).

- 7 The term “cagers” refers to the original playing court for basketball when it became an organized professional sport in Trenton, New Jersey in 1896. The basketball court was initially enclosed in a cage that was twelve feet high with wire-mesh fencing along its perimeter (Zhang 2019). The term “Filipino cagers” is therefore made in reference to local Filipino basketball players who apply their sporting skills on the basketball court representing their respective teams.
- 8 Idris Ali is an Egyptian Nubian author who sought to depict the marginal position of the Nubian community of which he belonged to in a postcolonial Egyptian nation and the role Egyptian nationalist policies played in that process of marginalization. The Nubians are from an ethnically, culturally, and linguistically distinct region straddling the border between Egypt and Sudan. Idris Ali’s novel, *Dongola: A Nubian Novel*, illustrates how the assertion of a distinctly postcolonial Egyptian national identity necessarily involved the ostracism of the Nubian minority. As noted by Dimeo (2015), the novel’s title captures the futility of its protagonist’s quest to speak for his people. It captures the expression of a distinctly “Nubian” state of marginalization in Egypt.

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SATWINDER SINGH REHAL is taking his PhD in Communication at the University of Queensland, Australia. He has a background in health sociology and social development planning. He was previously a lecturer in the HZB School of International Relations and Diplomacy at the Philippine Women's University and at Enderun Colleges, Taguig. <s.rehal@uqconnect.edu.au; dickush.rehal@gmail.com>