Abstract

This paper is a response to Bonnett’s call to examine Whiteness in its spatial diversity. Representations of women’s bodies in advertisements and the underlying White nationalist discourse they reflect is this study’s point of entry. Ostensibly, this is an examination of billboards in Central America, but it is also an exegesis of Whiteness and the nation conducted through a visual analysis of women’s bodies. The principal data are commercial representations of women and images of actual women in Costa Rica and Guatemala. The two questions being considered here are: 1) how does Whiteness operate as a visual discourse, and 2) what forms does Whiteness take in non-Anglo, non-European sites. This paper investigates the imbrications of race, gender, the body, and the nation.

It would seem a simple enough assumption that the end of colonialism ushers in the end of whiteness, or at least of its unrivaled ascendancy. Yet the cultural residues of whiteness linger in the postcolonial world as an ideal, often latently, sometimes not.

—Postcolonial Whiteness: A Critical Reader on Race and Empire, Alfred J. López (2005: 1)
Introduction
In *White Identities* (2000) Bonnett argues that White identities are global and as such should be examined in their spatial diversity. He was reacting to the field of Critical Whiteness Studies’ focus on Anglo-American and Western European nations, particularly the United States. The turn of the last millennium ushered in a preoccupation among scholars in the humanities and social sciences with the phenomena of Whiteness in its Western context (Babb, 1998; Bernardi, 1996; Brodkin, 1999; Daniels, 1997; Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Frye, 1999; Hale, 1998; Harris, 1995; Hill, 1997; Ignatiev, 1995; Lazarre, 1996; Roediger, 1991a, 1991b). Most of these works aim to expose Whiteness as a privileged subject position – i.e., to make Whiteness visible.

Whiteness in a modern U.S. context acts as a disciplining discourse that hierarchically orders society, while never questioning or substantiating what constitutes being White. It operates as an open secret, where levels of belonging and standing in the national collective are determined by skin tone and genealogy (Hunter, 2005; Peiss, 1998; Banet-Weiser, 1999). In U.S. history the *One-drop Rule*, where one drop of “Black blood” defined one as Black, and the Three-Fifths compromise of 1787, in which essentially a Black slave accounted for three-fifths of a White man, are explicit examples of how Whiteness—a discourse of appearances—categorizes, orders, and appraises individuals based upon the shades and forms of bodies (Harris, 1995). While this is the case within a U.S. milieu how does Whiteness function in contexts where those of supposed pure European bloodlines are the minority and where White identities are ambiguous? How does this discourse of appearances perform its disciplining and ordering functions in Latin America?

Taking up Bonnett’s challenge, this study examines visual representations and discourses of Whiteness in Central America. Ostensibly this study is an analysis of representations of females on billboards in Guatemala and Costa Rica, but more precisely it is an exploration of various body surfaces and the racial, social, and cultural infrastructure that bestows meaning upon these surfaces in these two places. The two arguments being put forth here are that Whiteness is not only a textual/audible discourse but also a visual discourse, and that Whiteness is a visual discourse that takes varying forms in varying context – i.e., places.

This work is an inquiry into the reach and persistence of Whiteness as an ordering and disciplining discourse. The principal source of evidence is visual in nature, the assumption underlying this work is that embedded within images, particularly agenda-driven images, are taken for granted racial discourses (Goldman, 1992). Visual ads are devices that function by juxtaposing and transferring meaning between objects within an image in such a way as to induce a desire within viewers to consume both the product and the identity it promises (Featherstone, 1996: 174). These identities are the products of discourses which act to situate and construct viewing subjects (Hale, 1998: 7).
Because it has traditionally functioned as a boundary marker of empires and nations, the female body is the third site in this analysis (McClintock, 1995: 24-28). This study compares billboard images of women in two different nations to images of women in their everyday lives. It is a comparison of commercial representations of women to actual women, as well as, a comparison of women across national contexts. This analysis will trace cultural discourses of Whiteness by closely reading images of the feminine form. This analysis seeks to reveal how Whiteness is performed in Guatemala and Costa Rica (Butler, 1993: 23).

**Race and women and nation: Unstable Whiteness in Latin America**

Nations are by definition exclusionary (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992: 39). They are constituted by their negative spaces, by that which lies beyond their borders (Dixon and Jones: 1998: 255). Anderson contends that nations are imagined communities where those within comprise a “fraternity” founded upon an ideology of belonging (2003: 7). Mayer posits that this ideology of belonging—nationalism—is an exercise in internal hegemony, “the exclusive empowerment of those who share a sense of belonging to the same ‘imagined community’” (2000: 1). Unlike a nation’s imagined community, its actual citizens are not abstract entities, but bodily raced and gendered subjects situated in specific places. Through acts of inclusion and exclusion, nations construct certain types of subjects who occupy certain types of bodies (McClintock, 1997: 89; Appelbaum et. al, 2003: 2).

Consequently, race and nation are often conflated (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992: 21-60). Unabridged membership in the national collective is contingent upon uncontaminated blood – the absence of the Other within the genealogical queue. Because race is bound to nation by notions of “racialized reproduction and racial nationalism,” women’s bodies lie in a paradoxical space, located at the core of the national collective yet forming the cuticle of the imagined community (Weinbaum, 2004: 17). They act as “boundary markers,” demarcating the limits of nations/races (McClintock, 1995; Radcliffe and Westwood, 1993). Reproduction in both its biological and social senses position female bodies at the nation’s threshold (Nelson, 1999: 216; Yuval-Davis, 1997).

The Iberian conquest of the Americas ignited a period of unbridled interracial sexual congress between Spanish and Portuguese men and indigenous and African women (Powers, 2005: 68). Most of this intercourse was non-consensual as this 1598 deposition of a Franciscan monk reveals:

> While accompanying Oñate on an expedition to the Pueblos [of Northern Mexico], I overheard the Spanish soldiers shouting: “Let us go to the pueblos to fornicate with Indian women… Only with lascivious treatment are Indian women conquered. (Powers, 2005: 69).
In the Spanish colonies these unions begot the mestizo and the mulatto. During the early Spanish colonial period, casta (mixed-raced) women were highly desired. This was due primarily to their quasi-Whiteness in colonies where there was a dearth of ‘actual’ White women. The fairness of their skins elevated in status mestizas and mulattas above their indigenous and African sisters. They began to slip from their privileged position in the late sixteenth century as more Spanish women immigrated to the colonies (Powers, 2005).

The availability of Spanish women and their capacity to reproduce Whiteness in the Americas via biologically Caucasian progeny, removed the need to grant ‘honorary’ Whiteness to mestizas. With increasing numbers of Spanish women in the colonies, Spain passed a series of laws curtailing the privileges of racially mixed peoples. To fix their “place” within the colonial socio-racial hierarchy the Spanish crown forbad casta women from wearing precious jewels or fine clothing so as to visibly differentiate them from “real White” women. A more rigid boundary developed between racial groups and endogamy became the norm in the seventeenth century. At the top of the socio-racial scale, Spaniards married other Spaniards more than 90 percent of the time, while at the bottom of the scale, indigenous individuals overwhelmingly married other indigenous individuals. Casta women often partnered extramaritally with Spanish men, thus if not marrying at least partnering up the scale. And because Spanish men closely guarded the virtue of their wives and daughters, casta men had little choice but to marry women from lower status racial groups – indigenous and African women (Powers, 2005: 89-90; Stoler, 1995: 52).

Latin America’s history of territorial and sexual conquest produced elaborate genealogical/racial/phenotype taxonomies (Yelvington, 2001: 238). Latin America is a site where identity and status are linked to genealogy; however, barring knowledge of ancestry, identity and status are inferred through visual markers of difference – skin color, body features, and dress (Mohanram, 1999: 67). Who you are is who you look like.

As Wade notes in Latin America there exists “…a hierarchy of [racially] mixed nations, according to the degree of mixture and where this places each nation on a global scale of whiteness” (2001: 849). Bodies as well as entire nations are ordered by Whiteness. This is why Indians, Africans, and castas—ever present dark figures, existing not only at the margins of all Latin American nations but also within their collective psyches and bloodlines—engender racial anxiety within these aspiring ‘White nations’ (Helg, 1990: 37-38). Several Latin American nations have attempted to solve their ‘Indian, African, mestizo, and mulatto problems’ by whitening on a national scale. In 1868 Argentina began its whitening campaign by launching several military attacks against its ‘barbarous’ Indians. By 1890 most of Argentina’s indigenous population had either been murdered or enslaved (Helg, 1990: 44). Argentina’s Black population, which in 1887 comprised 25 percent of Buenos Aires’s population, was simply swamped by the nation’s promotion of European immigration and its ban on non-White immigration.
By 1930 Argentina had more or less transformed itself into a White nation. Other Latin American countries were less successful in their whitening projects. Whitten, working in Ecuador, asserts that nationalism there is based on mestizaje, racial mixture, and that this nationalist discourse is employed to exclude the unmixed. This discourse tacitly encourages blanqueamiento – “‘whitening’ in terms of becoming more urban, more Christian, more civilized, less rural, less black, less Indian” (Whitten, 1981: 15; Wade, 1997: 84).

A discourse valorizing Whiteness inevitably distorts the thinking and behavior of the non-White. It forces individuals to conform to the imperatives of a racial hierarchy where skin-color is mapped upon socio-economic status. Radcliffe, also working in Ecuador, found that mixed-raced Ecuadorian women were more likely than mixed-raced men to self-identify as White. One respondent stated: “…Normally, everyone talks about mestizaje but I would say white. My grandparents always announced that they belonged to a [good] social class with their titles. They had a family tree” (1999: 220). Race is linked to genealogy and social standing. Consequently, if physically possible, individuals self-identify as White. This is particularly true of women because their socio-economic status is tied to their gender in specific ways. These women claim Whiteness to enhance their marriage prospects, for the sake of their children, and as a defense against unwanted sexual attention (Radcliffe, 1999: 223; Hale, 2006: 158-160). White women have a wider range of suitors to choose from, their children have more opportunities in life, and while Indian and Black women are viewed as inherently wanton and thus vulnerable to sexual predation, White women are assumed virtuous (Hunter, 2005).

White is better particularly if you are a woman, but what exactly does it mean to be White? Specifically, what is Whiteness outside of a European or an Anglo-American context? If race is not a fact of biology but rather a cultural fabrication, then how is it possible that something that is literally nothing can so profoundly affect so many lives (Baker, 1998)? This paper seeks to explore these issues by performing a visual discourse analysis upon Guatemalan and Costa Rican images to illuminate the dark margins of the nation in an endeavor to trace the potent, yet elusive corpus of White discourse (Rose, 2007).

**Race?: Guatemala and Costa Rica**

As Porter notes “official statistical categories occupy contested terrain,” and this is particularly true of racial categories (Porter, 1995: 41). Table 1 presents the official 2000 and 2002 government population estimates for Guatemala and Costa Rica, respectively. Table 2 presents alternative estimates. The Costa Rican estimates in Table 2 come from a genetic analysis of a random sample of the county’s population (Morera et al., 2003), while the Guatemalan estimates come from a historical demographic study of the country’s population (Lovell and Lutz, 1994). The values in the tables diverge in telling...
ways. The official state estimates in Table 1 show that the majority of the population in both Costa Rica and Guatemala is either White or Mestizo/Landino. Table 2 suggests that almost 40% of Costa Rica’s population is non-white and non-mestizo, and in a reversal of the numbers in Table 1, Table 2 suggests that Guatemala is a majority indigenous country. This racial discrepancy is likely due to the countries’ official census being based on surveyor observation and racial self-reporting. As presented above there are compelling reasons to self-identify as either White or Mestizo. As Nobles notes counting by ‘race’ is more a State and/or personal political exercise than it is an ontological enumeration (Nobles, 2000: 11; Stoler, 1995: 39).

### Table 1.
**Official ethnic/racial composition of Costa Rica and Guatemala.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>% of Population</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indígena/Indigenous</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>Indígena/Indigenous</td>
<td>41.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negra/Black</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>No Indígena/Non-Indigenous</td>
<td>59.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China/Chinese</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>(White &amp; Mestizo)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otra/Other (White &amp; Mestizo)</td>
<td>93.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ignorado/Unknown</td>
<td>2.6</td>
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</table>

**Sources:**
Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos de Costa Rica and Instituto Nacional de Estadística de Guatemala.

### Table 2.
**Unofficial ethnic/racial composition of Costa Rica and Guatemala.**

<table>
<thead>
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**Sources:**
In both Guatemala and Costa Rica racial inexactness is a function of proportions. Guatemala has the largest Indian (Amerindian) population in Central America. It was conceived as a colony populated by a small group of mostly male Spaniards and a vastly larger number of indigenous Maya. To bolster their numbers these Europeans allowed their mixed-blooded offspring to become honorary Whites (Wright, 2005: 255). As with most of Latin America’s ruling elites the Ladinos’ dreamed of a White nation, yet as Wright notes: “…[M]aya culture is itself a political act, a defiance of the Ladino state” (2005: 267). In 1847 the Maya, who had been largely reduced to serfdom by the Ladinos, rebelled against the state. The unsuccessful insurgence lasted more than six months (Wright, 2005: 257-259). Later, Ladinos’ efforts in the 1870s to modernize the country through plantation coffee production necessitated the expulsion of Mayas from their farms in the highlands (Grandin: 2000: 11). Also during this period the government encouraged immigration from Europe, particularly Germany, as a means of whitening the nation (Wright, 2005: 265). More recently (1980s and 1990s), the Guatemalan military destroyed Maya communities and tortured, raped, and massacred over one hundred thousand Maya (Grandin, 2000: 5-17). Guatemala is a nation that has been under contestation since its inception and as Nelson found, many Guatemalans currently conceive of their “nation as a wounded body… [where] attempts to address ethnic difference are painful proddings, irritating interventions” (1999: 1). Guatemala is a nation in the midst of a racial identity crisis. It is too Indian to be White, yet it desires Whiteness.

On the surface Costa Rica appears Guatemala’s antithesis. The following quote generally represents the ethos of Costa Rica: “We are one of the whitest nations: we have progressed because we are not bothered by inferior races” (Foote, 2004: 206). Costa Rica’s common and widespread image as a White nation is a myth. It began with the promulgation of the fiction that at the time of Columbus’s arrival (1502) there were few indigenous people in the region. In truth, there were as many as twenty different indigenous ethnic groups whose total population approximated 400,000 (Palmer and Molina, 2004: 4, 9). A little more than 100 years later disease, war, forced relocation, enslavement, and miscegenation reduced the indigenous population to 10,000. As in most of the Americas with time this decline in indigenous population reversed itself. The 1801 Costa Rican census found the population of 52,591 to be compose of Whites—American and European born Spaniards—(9.5%), Indians (15.7%), Mestizos (57.8%), and Blacks and Mulattoes (17%) (Aguilar Bugarelli and Alfaro Aguilar, 1997: 374). As these numbers suggest, Costa Rica has never been a ‘White’ nation (Giglioli, 1996; Rivers-Moore, 2007).

Perhaps even more so than the country’s indigenous populations, Blacks incited racial panic in the ‘White’ nation. Racial consternation is evident in this 1932 excerpt from a petition to the Costa Rican congress: “The congress should begin to pay attention to this Jamaican race that is not only the owners of the Atlantic region but is also invading
the interior of the country without anyone concerning themselves with the fact, and when they do begin to pay attention to it, it will be too late” (Palmer and Moline, 2004: 245).

Costa Rica and Guatemala have sought, through means both imaginative and brutal, to erase “the genetic burden” placed on the nation’s shoulders (Windes et. al, 2005: 86). Both want to be seen as modern Western nations – i.e., as White nations. What ensues is an exegesis of how mundane images embedded in the popular landscape reflect both nations’ desires for Whiteness.

**Selling Sex, Selling Towels, Selling Whiteness**

Taking seriously the idea that “what is seen depends on what there is to see and how we look at it” (Roeder, 1998: 275), the following visual analysis takes a critical look at mundane, and seemingly trivial, popular cultural texts. A critical look is one which contemplates the visual as a product of culturally embedded practices and power relations, while further recognizing that images are abstracted from the world and deconstructed, reconstituted, re-contextualized and re-projected for consumption by intended and unintended audiences (Rogoff, 2000: 34; Lister and Wells, 2002: 83-89). The visual is a discourse infected field, teaming with difference procreating narratives which renders men from women, the public from the private, Whites from Others, nature from society, those with means from those without, nations from nations,... (Haraway, 1991: 188). Ironically, visual discourses perform their cleaving beyond view leaving the viewing subject to assume that the divisions they leave in their wake are innate.

A critical gaze is focused on Guatemalan and Costa Rican billboards (Figures 1 and 2). The Guatemalan billboard, situated along a road, and the Costa Rican billboard, abutting a two-story building, were both photographed in 1983. They are ads for Fáxel-20 towels produced by indutex® a maker of linens located in Guatemala and distributed in Costa Rica by the Ferol inc. and El Triunfo store chains. Elements of the vernacular landscape, such as billboards, transmit popular cultural images that viewers often see but seldom actually look at with intent. Juxtaposed, it is obvious that these two images
are the same yet different. By cross-culturally analyzing the raced, sexed, gendered, and nationalist discourses emanating from the surfaces of these eroticized twinned bodies, the ordering and disciplining efficacy of Whiteness may be made comprehensible.

Seeing, as Merleau-Ponty notes, is a bodily process. When we view other bodies we view them through the prism of our own bodies: “The theory of the body schema is, implicitly, a theory of perception” (Merleau-Ponty, 2002: 239). If this is so then what do Guatemalan and Costa Rican women see in themselves when they gaze up at these images (Figures 1 and 2)?

Billboards are marketing devices specifically designed to induce desire. Due to the specificity of their mission, they all tend to exhibit common attributes (Messaris, 1997). For instance the positioning of billboards requires viewers to look upward. Market research has consistently found that low angle views (views from below) give a sense of power and authority to the object being viewed (Messaris, 1997: 34). Moreover, note that both of these women are looking away rather than directly at their viewers; both wear indifferent expressions. Their unsmiling and slightly contemptuous manner is the same as those found on the faces of high-fashion models. The aim of this haughty visage is to educe status anxiety (Messaris, 1997: 40). The message transmitted is that the world they represent is superior to the one inhabited by the viewing subject. Assuming that females purchase most of the linens for their households, these images invite women viewers of means and ‘beauty’ to self-identify with the image, while they seek to seduce women lacking these advantages to desire this world of beauty and to view the towels that adorn their bodies as gateways to it. However, presuming an audience composed of predominately heterosexual female viewers, what is the rationale for adopting semi-nude representations of women to sell towels to flesh and blood women? Messaris has suggested that when women view images of other women their vision is often mediated by a male gaze – “what will he think of me if I looked like that” (1997: 40-44). This transgendered vision impels women to conform to patriarchal definitions of womanhood. Much of the work of advertising is educating consumers in what they should desire. With this transgendered vision in mind what exactly are these images of women teaching Guatemalan and Costa Rican women about being women?

These images are similar yet different; different bodies similarly posed. The Costa Rican compared to the Guatemalan image appears bronze in skin tone as opposed to brown, has thinner lips, appears to be larger and taller (length of neck and head above the billboard frame), and on her upper right-hand forearm appears an understated gold band, which greatly contrasts with the exotic bracelets the Guatemalan model wears on both wrists. Yet, their hair offers the most striking difference between the two images. This is significant because besides breasts, hair is the most prominent marker of femininity. The Guatemalan model has flowing brunette tresses, while the Costa Rican model is blond and pigtailed. She appears Nordic in ethnicity. The choice of a blond model for a Costa Rican market seems odd. In the region most closely associated with
fair hair, northern Europe, only roughly five percent of the population is naturally blond (Pitman, 2003: 4). While population estimates for Costa Rican blondes are unavailable, given the demographic history of the country, it can be inferred that natural blondes are quite rare there.

Perhaps owing to their rarity, blondes are perceived as more desirable – as more attractive and more sexual (Pitman, 2002: 4; Lakoff and Scherr: 1984: 144-146). Blond performers such as Jean Harlow, Marilyn Monroe, Madonna, Xuxa, Shakira, Marta Sanchez, and Christina Aguilera have used their fair-hair (often gained through chemical means) to propel their careers (Dyer, 2004; Simpson, 1993). Along side, but not separate from blondness as aesthetic ideal, is blondness as icon of White supremacy. The idea of a superior blond-haired, blue-eyed Aryan race first emerged in Europe toward the end of the eighteenth century (Pitman, 2002: 158-159; Seshadri-Crooks, 2000: 51-55; Hannaford, 1996: 319; Hutton, 2005: 101). Here beauty and race are bound together by the belief that blondes embody Whiteness at its purest (Dyer, 2004: 44).

Assuming that fair-haired discourses travel, then, in a very real way, from her perch, this haughty, two-dimensional, blonde informs the women of Costa Rica on what it means to truly belong to the nation. What she is selling is not just Faxel-20 towels. She is also peddling Whiteness. The effectiveness of this pitch is unknown but it is interesting in and of itself that the marketers of these towels concluded that a blond female image would be effective in a country where so few women are naturally blond. This image, as well as the Guatemalan image, is a type of gendering technology – various social apparatuses such as “institutionalized discourses, epistemologies, and critical practices, as well as practices of daily life,” which function to produce gendered subjects (de Lauretis, 1987: 2). These images are employed within these two different patriarchal societies to instruct women on the meaning of Costa Rican and Guatemalan womanhood.

It is not being suggested here that marketers in these nations conspire to sell types of racialized femininity along with their towels; rather advertising is essentially a conservative institution that re-circulates and hence reinforces social norms (Twitchell, 2003: 192). Marketers in these two nations enlist deeply culturally infused racialized norms of female beauty as lures in their ads. They utilized raced and gendered discourses to create a desire in female visual consumers for beauty/Whiteness. Which raises the question: Who is the audience for these ads?

National Bodies, Real Bodies:
Figures 3, 4, and 5 offer some clues as to intended and unintended audiences for the Costa Rican billboard. Figure 3 is a photograph from Golfito in the state of Puntarenas. The two women and the young boy in the photograph do not resemble the blonde on the billboard. Rather, with her long dark hair and brown skin, the young woman at the center of the picture bears a striking resemblance to the image of the woman on the Guatemalan billboard.
Until 1938 Golfito was a small frontier town. In that year the United Fruit Company shifted most of its operations from the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica to the southwest Pacific coast of the country. As part of the contract with the government for the land, the company had to agree not to hire any of the Afro-Caribbean labors who were the primary workforce at the former location. The irony in this is that most of the workers in Golfito were peasant farmers from the northwest Pacific coast state of Guanacaste (Preston-Werner, 2009: 17). Both physically and culturally Guanacaste is arguably the most distant Costa Rican region. Before 1825 the region was a Southern state of neighboring Nicaragua. The population of the region is a mix of the Chorotega indigenous group, Spaniards, and the descendents of African slaves brought over by the Spanish during the colonial period. It is likely that the young woman in the photograph as well as the older woman and the child are near descendants of this mixture of peoples.
Guanacaste’s ethnic diversity is on display in Figure 4. The image is of a health clinic waiting room in Huacas, Guanacaste. The image reveals a contrast of body types and skin colors. Viewed from left to right, the little girl and the woman next to her (presumably her mother) and the little girl next to her (presumably sister and daughter to the other two) have African features (note their faces). The little girl to the left and the little girl in the center have kinky hair. An interesting feature of the little girl in the center of the photograph is that not only is her hair kinky it is also light brown approaching blond, but not the blond of the woman on the billboard. The woman in the middle with the baby appears to be a mix of indigenous and Spanish, while the woman to the right of her appears more indigenous.

The image in Figure 5 was taken in the cultural center of Costa Rica, its capital San José located in the central valley of Costa Rica. It is a photograph of an Afro-Costa Rican mother and child. Of all the women in these photographs she looks the least like the blonde on the billboard. She and her child being in this place, the central valley, call into question the claim that Costa Rica is a White nation. Costa Ricans consider the Central Valley the heart of the nation. The United Fruit Company’s agreement, mentioned above, not to hire Blacks for their Pacific coast operations also de facto prohibited Blacks from moving outside of the Caribbean province of Limón (Harpelle, 2001). While the Central Valley has been viewed as White, Limón has been marked as the Black spot of the nation (Sharman, 2001). In the imagined racial cartographies of Costa Rica this Black woman and her child are out of place.

The female image which appears most similar to the blonde on the billboard can be seen in Figure 6. This type of Europeanize image of the Semitic Southwest Asian mother Mary and her son are ubiquitous icons in the Catholic world. It does not seem implausible to suppose that these types of images of the Virgin Mary were the first two-dimensional female gender technologies employed as instructional devices in Whiteness.
in the Americas (Salinas, 1992). The conforming and disciplining power of this White image is illustrated in Mata Cruz-Janzen’s recollection of growing up as a dark skinned child in Puerto Rico:

I wanted to be the Virgin Mary for the community Christmas celebration when I was in third grade in Puerto Rico. A teacher quickly informed me that the mother of Christ could not be black. A girl with blond hair and blue eyes was selected for the role, and I was a shepherd. (2001: 175)

The beautiful White Virgin is in a very real way a progenitor of the blonde on the billboard.

As in Figures 4, 5, and 6, the subject of Figure 7 is also motherhood. Figure 7 shows a mothers’ day poster in a school in the village of José Poaquil, Guatemala. What is noteworthy about this image is that while blondness clearly illuminates Whiteness as visual discourse, because of its larger indigenous population Whiteness as blondness is even less accessible to most Guatemalans than it is to most Costa Ricans, yet the figures on the posters are both fair-haired. More incongruous, the little girl on the poster is golden blond with blue eyes. Contrast this image with that of some of the women working at this school – Figure 8. They are dark-skinned, dark-haired indigenous Maya dressed in traje (traditional clothing). Most of the students, teachers, and workers at the school resemble more these women than they do the females in the mothers’ day poster or the billboard image.

In general Whiteness is a much more understated corporal discourse in Guatemala than Costa Rica. Whiteness in Guatemala reveals itself through subtle body markers. Figure 9 is an example of this subtlety. The women in Figure 9 reside in the capital, Guatemala City, and in the context of Guatemala; these women are White (Ladinos) as opposed to the women in Figure 8 who are Indians. But how are these two groups
of women raced? What makes an Indian, Indian as opposed to White? The most conspicuous difference between the women in the two photographs is their clothing. Globally and historically identity and class position have been linked to garments (Entwistle, 2000; Crane, 2000). Additionally, as a byproduct of cultural globalization, a Western and by extension White style of fashion has spread rapidly across the world (Maynard, 2004). Secor in her study of veiled Muslim women living in urbane, Westernized Istanbul demonstrates how dress as marker of identity is place contingent (2002). Who these women are as evident by their body coverings is a function of where they happened to find themselves. The same is true for women in Guatemala. The three rural women in Figure 8 in traditional Mayan dress are Indians because they dress like Indians, while the three urban women in the foreground of figure 5, and perhaps the fourth woman in the background of the photograph, are Ladino or White as revealed by their modern Western clothing. Here Whiteness is something that you put on.

Because visual markers of identity in Guatemala are more closely associated with vestments than with bodies, Figure 1, a semi-nude image, poses an interpretive problem. While there are elements of this image that appear vaguely indigenous such as the bracelets she wears, to locate this woman along a scale that includes Indians on one end and Ladinos (Whites) at the other the telltale clue is provided by her most prominent visible feature – her hair. Note the difference in hairstyles between the women in the
foreground of Figure 9 and the women in Figure 8. The women shown in Figure 8 are uncoiffed, while the woman on the billboard like the three women in Figure 9 has styled hair. She is White. White because as a sales device she was constructed to be a Guatemalan paragon of beauty. Here the aesthetic and the racial are indivisible. Her racial foils are the three native dressed rural women in Figure 8, while those nearest her in racial style are the three modern dressed urban women in Figure 9.

This leaves the woman in the background of Figure 9. Where is she located in this particular mapping of modernity, place, and race? It seems significant that she stands apart from the group in the foreground. She does not appear to belong to their social class. She is different in a category of appearance as well as in a socio-economic sense of the word class. The two are linked and run parallel. Her clothes are not as fashionable and her hair is not coiffed. While the others appear insouciant, she seems taxed. It could be that she does not live in this neighborhood but rather works here.

It is possible that she may have only recently left the countryside and her life as an Indian behind to become a White city dweller. Media images like that of the towel draped woman on the billboard may have lured her and many others to the city with their promises of beauty, wealth, and Whiteness. This is all speculation, but what seems clear is that she represents a midpoint between the women in Figure 8 and the women in the foreground of Figure 9.

Figure 10 is an image of an actual paragon of Guatemala. Miss Guatemala, eighteen year old Rogelia Cruz Martínez, was a contestant in the 1959 Miss Universe pageant. Nine years later she would die a brutal and sexually sadistic death for what was considered a betrayal of the Ladino nation. Of all the images of Guatemalan women she is the one that most resembles the image on the billboard. Like the woman on the billboard her hair is coiffed, she is brown but not dark, she is posing and she is being looked up at, and she is only partially dressed. Like the woman on the billboard she is...
an object, a Guatemalan symbol of womanhood. They both represent the beauty their country has to offer in femininity:

*Nuestra joven compatriota, que es una exponente de la belleza guatemalteca y muestra en el contraste de sus ojos garzos y sus cabellos castaños algo del reflejo de nuestros lagos al ser besados por el sol de la tarde. (Espiral, Summer 1959, page 4 (as cited in Treacy, 2001: 43))

Our young countrywoman (Rogelia) is an exponent (representative) of Guatemalan beauty and shown in the contrast of her hazel (bluish-green) eyes and her brown hair reflects something of our lakes being kissed by the afternoon sun. (author’s translation)

Here the writer compares the female body to the motherland which begot her and as in biological mother and daughter relationships the daughter reflects the mother. This 1959 passage from the Guatemalan woman’s magazine *Espiral* poetically reveals the sentiments of its author and it suggests the sentiments of its readers. Most of these readers would have been, like Rogelia, Ladinos (Whites). This passage is actually a type of feminine/spatial syllogism: The woman is beautiful like the country; the woman is White; thus the country is White. The nature of this Whiteness is suggested in word choice. Instead of describing her eyes as blue, azules, the author describes them as being hazel or bluish-green, garzos. (Treacy, 2001: 43). As noted above blond hair and blue eyes are considered markers of true Whiteness. Also noted, this type of Whiteness is inaccessible to most Guatemalans. Rogelia like the Guatemalan billboard image is White within a Guatemalan context. She was considered White in Guatemala, but probably few of the 1959 parade-watchers in Long Beach saw her as White.

How she was viewed outside of Guatemala can be inferred by Guatemalan journalists at the pageant who reported that viewers found her an “exotic beauty”
She was perceived as a beautiful Other. Later her beauty along with that of her Latin American co-contestants would be thrown into question. A July 24th 1959 headline in the Long Beach Independent read, “Europe Lovelies Back Latins Off the Beauty Map.” The headline refers to the semifinal pool of contests being comprised of mostly European and Anglo-American women. This aesthetic regionalization did not go uncontested:

“They don’t appreciate and understand Latin beauties,” She [Ecuadorian judge Chislaine Rendon de Amador said…]

Mrs. De Amador … said that the judges were selecting the girls “on American standards, not international standards. (“Latins miffed at ‘U’ Judging, The Long Beach Press Telegram, Saturday, July 25, 1959 – Section B)

One of Rogelia’s successors as feminine surrogate for the nation and her Costa Rican counterpart are seen in Figure 11. Miss Guatemala, Cindy Ramirez Lemus, and Miss Costa Rica, Cristine de Mezerville Ferreto, are embodiments of their nations. In many ways these two beauty queens mirror the two billboards in their respective countries. Like the women on their respective billboards Miss Guatemala and Miss Costa Rica represent idealized Guatemalan and Costa Rican womanhood, yet in their faces and on her bodies can be seen the Indian and imagined the African. Nevertheless, the thing linking Miss Guatemala and Miss Costa Rica is not the Indian and the African, but rather what they represent in their respective countries – the negation of the Indian and the African.
This study has taken up Bonnett’s call to interrogate Whiteness in its spatial diversity by attempting to trace the outlines of Whiteness through deciphering its visual discourses in Guatemala and Costa Rica. It has attempted this task by using the surfaces of women’s bodies as lens.

In his genealogies of the body Foucault elucidates the means by which bodies are discursively engraved (Foucault, 1977; Lash, 1996). Power laden discourses, he observed, work to reproduce societies and their cultures by categorizing, normalizing, and emplacing bodies; discourses operate on bodies not through direct physical means but via a gaze which disciplines the subconscious mind (Lash, 1996: 259). Whiteness is a discourse of appearances that acts to “colonize the minds” of Others to accept their place within a visual/corporal hierarchy where being White, whatever that means, is the pinnacle position (hooks, 1992; wa Thiong’o, 1986). Simply, Whiteness produces raced subjects. This study suggests that Whiteness engenders different types of raced subjects in Guatemala and Costa Rica.

In Guatemala, a country with a large Indian nation within the nation, Whiteness is largely a style of appearance. In Guatemala dress is a text, and while shedding Mayan
traje does not in and of itself make one White/Ladina, it does signal, to those reading
the body, a move away from indigenousness toward Whiteness (Macleod, 2004). There
is an ongoing contest in Guatemala over the nation’s racial identity, yet Ladino and
Mayan are not that different. Most Ladians and Mayans share common bloodlines. In
such a context Whiteness is a paradoxical identity.

While Whiteness appears to be a more fixed identity in Costa Rica, in truth it is
not. The nation’s White icons do not match the images of many of its people. Costa Rica
can claim to be the whitest of Central American nations only by eliding the Indians and
Africans in its midst and in its bloodlines. Once the Indian and the African are made
visible it becomes clear that Whiteness in Costa Rica is also a paradoxical identity.

But of course, Whiteness is always a paradoxical identity. It is a negational identity
– a subjectivity defined by what it is not. This lack of internal definition allows it to take
on varying forms within various contexts. An example of place specific Whiteness can
be seen in a rather unexpected place. Deborah Shamoon’s study of redezu komikku—
hard-core pornographic Japanese “ladies’ comics”—depicts several erotic drawings of
Japanese women (2004). What is striking about these drawings is all the Japanese women
are blond and European in appearance. While Japan was defeated and briefly occupied
by the United States, unlike Latin America it has never been colonized by the U.S. or
any European power. It is a successful, modern, and largely an ethno-homogeneous
nation. Depictions of “White Japanese women” being sold to Japanese women and men,
suggests that Whiteness is not just an Anglo-European phenomena. It is something
much more global and much more pernicious, as seen in the work of Winders, Jones III,
and Higgins (2005) and Glenn (2008) who observed and remarked upon women’s use
of skin lightening creams in Mexico, South Africa, India, the Philippines, Japan, China,
and Korea. Whiteness is a universal discourse which colonizes minds by stigmatizing
the bodies of dark skinned Others.
References


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