Imaging the Igorot in Vernacular Films Produced in the Cordillera

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the images of the Igorot in vernacular films produced by Igorot filmmakers in the Northern Luzon Cordillera. Employing a postcolonial framework, the study proposes that this body of self-representative work gives confidence to the Igorot community to tell their own stories which have been ignored, misunderstood, or misrepresented from colonial to contemporary times. With semiotics as analytical tool, this study first examines the images of the Igorot in Philippine mainstream films. The study points out that the master tropes of animalization and intellectual infancy generally describe the prevailing image of the Igorot in mainstream cinema. In an attempt to show the potential of vernacular films as counter-discourse to mainstream cinema, the study also submits the vernacular films to a semiotic examination. Vernacular films are shown confronting mainstream stereotypes by foregrounding Igorot agency and collective action. The study concludes, however, that despite the constructive images that they create, the vernacular films fall short of truly reformulating stereotypical images of the Igorot in mainstream cinema because they reinforce dominant misconceptions about the Igorot. These films therefore fail to produce a more complex representation of the Igorot community or to lay the foundations of an empowered Igorot cinema.

Keywords: vernacular film, Igorot self-representation, Cordillera filmmaking, semiotic analysis, postcolonial criticism, counter-discourse, stereotypes.

With its distinctive mountain terrain and exotic cultures, the Northern Luzon Cordillera has long been a resource of images for Philippine mainstream cinema. Mainstream filmmakers have employed Igorot cultural practices or Cordillera settings in their productions and this strategy has proved to be an effective means of generating interest in their films. In 1954, for instance, Gerardo de Leon made *Ifugao* which won him honors at the Asian Film Festival that year, and in 1968 Luis

Nepomuceno made *Igorota*, starring the celebrated actress Charito Solis, whose display of bare breasts at a time when it was taboo to do so, stirred controversy and brought much attention to this film (Lumbera 1989). Although these films were lauded in the Philippines and abroad, they were not received well by the Igorot whose lives they featured. Baguio journalist Cecile Afable, in her column in the December 22, 1968 issue of the *Baguio Midland Courier*, wrote that "there was going to be a demonstration against the showing of the film *Igorota* [in Baguio]. The Igorots say that it is a poor showing of themselves." In the March 1, 1970 issue of the same paper, Afable reported that "a group of Igorots carried placards to the UP in Baguio where the producer and director of the movie *Igorota* was delivering a talk on film production in this country."

Despite protests like those observed by Afable, mainstream producers have not been deterred from including images of the Igorot in their films. In the 1990s, a number of films on the Igorot were made and among the most notable was *Mumbaki* which, like de Leon's film, is about the Ifugao. Despite the objections of a group of Ifugao professionals enraged by what they claimed to be an outright misinterpretation of native practices, this film went on to win the 1996 best picture award given out by FAMAS (Filipino Academy of Movie Arts and Sciences), Star Awards, and the Young Critics Circle. In the following decade, the inclusion of Igorot images in mainstream films continued, done apparently to spice up mainstream productions which had become repetitive in plot, characterization, and cinematic style.

The employment of unflattering images of the Igorot in mainstream films reinforces already negative images of these people as drawn by earlier discourses. The word 'Igorot' is an "indigenous Filipino word originally meaning 'mountaineer'" (Scott 1993, 69). During the Spanish period, however, it was used to refer to non-Christian populations living in the mountains of the present provinces of Nueva Vizcaya, Pangasinan, Ilocos Sur, Benguet, Mountain Province and Ifugao. With the sustained resistance of these mountain people against Spanish conquest, the term 'Igorot' came to be used in missionary narratives and bureaucratic reports with the connotation of "uncivilized naked savages." When the Americans took over the Philippines at the turn of the 20th century, they produced "ethnographic surveys [that] usually reinforced Western concepts of the irrational and therefore incomprehensible primitive for colonialist ends" (Tolentino 2001, 4). According to Scott (1993, 55), however, the Americans admired the "Igorots' adjustment to a cruelly inhospitable environment and their 350-year resistance to Spanish conquest" so they set up a special administrative unit in the highlands. This admiration, says Scott, was not shared by urbane lowland Filipinos "who considered such failure to accept Spanish culture utterly deplorable." This situation amplified

the derogatory connotations of the word 'Igorot'. In many of the the writings and photographs of those who came later to the highlands, the image of the Igorot as uncivilized, crude and backward became well-established.

Against this backdrop of negative representation, the production of vernacular films by Igorot filmmakers beginning in 1993 may be seen as an opportunity for the presentation of Igorot images which could serve as alternative to what have been created by mainstream cinema. As a body of self-representative work from the periphery, these films promise to contribute new perspectives and unconventional visions which create greater diversity in what has come to be known as the film industry.

The production of these films was initiated by Sammy Dangpa, a Lutheran lay minister from Buguias, Benguet who worked with American Lutheran missionaries then engaged in dubbing into Kankana-ey several English films based on biblical stories. Through the support of these missionaries, Dangpa founded the Vernacular Video Ministry (VVM) whose aim was to produce vernacular films for catechism. With equipment and funds donated by the missionaries, Dangpa produced films in partnership with local Protestant churches in Benguet whose members served as volunteer crew members and talents. The favorable response of communities where the vernacular films were shown for free prompted VVM to produce more films and to sell VCD copies (Dangpa 2007). Later, with its growing ministry, VVM decided to become a legal organization. In early 2008 VVM was registered as "a faith-based, non-stock, non-profit organization" with the Securities and Exchange Commission (Gaab 2008). As stated in its article of incorporation, the organization aims "to produce biblically-based and culturally relevant vernacular films" and "to evangelize and nurture ethnic communities." From 1993 to 2008, VVM produced 16 full-length films in different Cordillera languages (Kankana-ey, Ibaloi, Kalanguya) and Ilocano. Many of these are narrative films about Igorot families and individuals whose ethnic traditions and values are set against Christian beliefs, influence of outsiders, trappings and trends of modern living, and desire for better living conditions. Most of the stories in these films are anchored on biblical passages presented in text and voice-over either at the beginning or end of each film. Some films include interviews with local people. Some incorporate footages of cultural events in the Cordillera and videos of local and foreign locations.

Although these films have not found their way to the movie houses, they have become popular among Igorots in the Cordillera including those who live and work elsewhere. In Benguet and Mt. Province, the popularity of these films may be seen in the penchant of not a few farmers in marking their vegetable transport vehicles with the titles of

these films. The songs included in these films have also been widely patronized, with some performers gaining local celebrity status.

With the increasing popularity of these films, other Igorot individuals saw the potential of vernacular filmmaking. A non-government organization based in Aritao, Nueva Vizcaya called Tribal Cooperation for Rural Development (Tricord) produced its first (and to date its only) film in 2007 to promote its advocacy for community development especially for Ifugao, Kankana-ey and Bugkalot communities residing in upland barangays of Nueva Vizcaya and Ifugao. Although Tricord sought technical assistance from VVM personnel, it provided the concept, funds and talents for this film based on the life story of one Tricord staff member who played herself in the film (Bugtong 2008). An informal group of film enthusiasts and businessmen from Mankayan, Benguet, on the other hand, became interested in vernacular filmmaking as a business venture. Having witnessed the wide reception of VVM films in their town and elsewhere, the members of this group called Indigenous Film Productions (IFP) believed that their own production would be received with equal enthusiasm, and in 2007 they released their first film (Bestoca 2008). This film, directed by an actor who appeared in an earlier VVM production, expectedly had a narrative line similar to stories in VVM films.

It is often assumed that films produced within a community are "more faithful" to the community's sense of self compared to films produced by outsiders. By supposing that members of a community are better informed about community life, this assumption recognizes the value of community involvement in cinematic production. However, by automatically ascribing to these films a sympathetic value to the community that produced them, this view ignores the possibility that the productions might, in fact, work to reinscribe rather than dismantle dominant beliefs. It is with this incredulity to the inherent sympathy of the vernacular films to the Igorot community that this study proceeds to interrogate the representational practice of this cinema. In examining these films, I seek to ascertain their promise in the creation of representations that emancipate the Igorot from the prejudicial view of mainstream cinema. I look into cinematic strategies employed in these films and determine if indeed these work to create more complex images of the Igorot that go beyond the simplistic versions presented in mainstream films. In the same way, I analyze these strategies to find out if they reinforce the prevailing images of the Igorot perpetuated in mainstream films.

Postcolonial theory and cinema

Analysis of the vernacular films produced by Igorot filmmakers to examine their potential in positing an alternative cultural identity for this community calls for the use of postcolonial theory because of this theory's interest in representation and discourse with particular attention to issues concerning disenfranchised indigenous communities. According to Mongia (1997), postcolonial theory turns to language and problematizes the nature of representation itself and of an assumed linguistic transparency that gives access to a reality that lies out there. Its attention to the contingency of representation leads to analyses of both the ways in which knowledge is produced and the means of constructing authority in disciplines of intellectual production.

Although it predates the conception of postcolonial theory, countertelling in cinema, in the spirit of a postcolonial critique, began with the postwar collapse of the European empires and the emergence of independent Third World nation-states (Bordwell and Thompson 2003). Third World film ideology was crystallized in a wave of militant manifesto essays in the 1960s: "Esthetic of Hunger" by the Brazilian Glauber Rocha, "For an Imperfect Cinema" by the Cuban Julio Garcia Espinosa, and "Towards a Third Cinema" by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino of Argentina. A salient feature of Third World cinema in the 1960s and 1970s is the attempt, at once theoretical and practical, to formulate an esthetic and a production method appropriate to the economic situation of Third world nations. In "Esthetics of Hunger," Rocha (1965) highlights the role of a revolutionary cinema in alleviating the "wretchedness" of Latin America which is rooted in its neocolonial situation. Recognizing the lack of technical resources to match the affluence of commercial film production, Rocha promotes the transformation of this lack into an expressive force. He considers scarcity as a signifier that rejects the relative luxury and self-indulgence of antecedent Brazilian commercial cinema that produces "happy and fast films with no messages" because they have "purely industrial aims." These "technicolor patches," according to Rocha "do not hide but only worsen hunger's tumors." He also believes that "miserabilism" or the employment of images that call attention to underdevelopment undermines the bureaucratic hierarchies of conventional production because "only a culture of hunger, drenched in its own structures, can take a qualitative leap" (Rocha 1965, 2).

Like Rocha, Espinosa (1969) is also concerned with the role of cinema in consolidating social transformation and with building a new relationship between culture and society. Espinosa begins by opposing the technical perfection of Western cinema which, according to him, "is almost always reactionary cinema." He then offers a new poetics of what he calls "imperfect cinema" which "finds its audience in those

who struggle" and "its themes in their problems." This cinema contrasts with Western cinema which concerns itself with celebration of results and outcomes. In its concern with process, "imperfect cinema" is also indifferent to mere quality or technique. For Espinosa, the test of a film is its response to the dismantling of elite designs that have conditioned its form. Espinosa also points out that "imperfect cinema" disentangles itself from procedures characteristic of Western "perfect cinema." It does not draw on mass art, that is, the kind of art made by a minority for the masses who are defined as mere consumers or spectators. Instead, "imperfect cinema" draws lessons from popular art in which "the creators are at the same time the spectators and vice versa" and art is "carried out as but another life activity combating the limitations of taste, museum art, and the demarcation lines between the creator and the public" (Espinosa 1969, 4).

Solanas and Getino (1969), in their manifesto "Towards a Third Cinema," echo Espinosa's distrust of Western formal perfection. Their program—which forms part of a necessary decolonization of culture—proposes a cinema of subversion that involves two complementary procedures: the destruction of the old modes of conceiving cinema and the old image shaped by colonialism and neocolonialism and the creation of a new cinema. They challenge two existing forms of cinema, both of which are "perfect" in Espinosa's terms. For them, "first cinema" is Hollywood. They assert that this model must be attacked on every level since even the adoption of the merely formal elements of the dominant Hollywood film language leads inevitably to the adoption of its ideological assumptions. The only real alternatives to Hollywood cinema that they pick out are those forms of "author's cinema"—from the French *nouvelle vague* to the Brazilian *cinema novo* – which they dub "second cinema." For Solanas and Getino, however, even the advance that these represent is a limited one. Although they do constitute attempts at cultural decolonization and lead their filmmakers to express themselves "in nonstandard language," they are still contained within the dominant system. Only "third cinema," which they advocate, breaks free from these constraints. Solanas and Getino's own stance is based on their confidence in the mass audience because they claim that the best militant cinema has shown that "social layers considered backward" are able "to capture the exact meaning of an association of images, an effect of staging, and any linguistic experimentation placed within the context of a given idea." In Solanas and Getino's view, filmmakers are therefore free to be innovative in their use of the resources of cinema, but for revolutionary communication to occur, filmmakers must disregard the traditional film industry's notions of hierarchy and professionalism and work instead to "demystify the medium." Solanas and Getino believe that Third cinema can only fulfill its role as "the most important revolutionary artistic event of our times" when

filmmakers oppose the cinema of characters, individuals, and authors with a cinema of themes, the masses, and collective work and when they counteract misinformation, escape, and passivity.

Images of the Igorot in Philippine mainstream cinema

Postcolonial criticism underlines the significance of colonial legacy in the construction of the conceptual foundations of western thought. Gyan Prakash, for instance, suggests that even as it attempts to dismantle Enlightenment certainties, postcolonial theory acknowledges their continuing and residual power. In this project that analyzes the vernacular films, therefore, it is important to first locate these films in the representational practice of Philippine mainstream cinema which has preceded the production of vernacular films.

This study defines "Philippine mainstream cinema" as the established industry of filmmaking dominated by big studios based in Manila whose primary motivation is return of investment. Due to contraints in obtaining copies of early films on the Igorot like the de Leon and Nepomuceno films cited earlier, this paper considers only a selection of films produced by Manila studios from the 1990s onward. Although there are films on the Igorot produced by independent filmmakers,[1] they are not included in this study because of the different circumstances of their production. The films that will be discussed are not all exclusively focused on Igorot situations, but they all portray, in varying degrees, Igorot characters and their (alleged) way of life.

In its discussion of the images of the Igorot in Philippine mainstream films, this study adopts the analytical categories proposed by Shohat and Stam (1994) in their discussion of Third World films in *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, a groundbreaking work that engages in a decidedly postcolonial project. Because Shohat and Stam expose the complex and subtle means by which Eurocentric ideas trickled to the colonized world, and call particular attention to filmmaking practices in former colonies that destabilized these established views, the analytical categories they present are pertinent to this study which proceeds in a similar direction.

Images of the Igorot in Philippine mainstream films may be generally described according to two master tropes of colonialism identified by Shohat and Stam. The first trope, infantilization, treats the colonized as embodying an earlier stage of individual human or broad cultural development. With the colonizer possessing positional superiority, the colonized adults are projected to be intellectually identical to White children. Infantilization as a trope also posits the political immaturity of colonized peoples seen as Calibans suffering from "Prospero Complex," that is, an inbred dependency on the leadership of white Europeans. In Philippine mainstream films, this

colonial trope of infantilization is translated into the relationship between the dominant group that produces these films and the marginalized people like the Igorot who become subjects of mainstream productions.

Figure 1. The Ibaloi are reduced to a passive mass in this scene from *Sabel*.

The infantilization of the Igorot is apparent in several mainstream films like *Sabel* (Regal Films, 1994), about a nun, Sabel, who leaves her congregation after falling in love with an inmate in a Manila prison. When her relationship with this man turns sour, she flees to Baguio where she meets Toni, a doctor who works as a medical volunteer in an Ibaloi village in Benguet. Sabel joins Toni in her work and they both take active roles in supporting livelihood activities in addition to promoting good health practices. At the time of their stay in the village, a corporation applies to mine the area, and a lawyer representative comes to buy out the lands of the residents. Sympathetic to the place and people they have learned to love, Sabel and Toni lead the villagers' resistance against the mining firm. Because of the opposition, the firm withdraws its mining plans, but Toni is raped by the lawyer. Out to avenge her friend, Sabel kills the lawyer and is tried in a local court where an Ibaloi man who witnessed her crime nevertheless attests to her innocence. Sabel is freed on count of self-defense.

Infantilization in this film first translates into a binary opposition of activity and passivity. Depicted as incapable of sustaining a fight for themselves, the Ibaloi are on the passive end of this opposition. At the forefront of their resistance against a mining firm that seeks to displace them is an articulate lowland doctor who speaks on their behalf in

addition to looking after their health. During confrontations with the firm's representative (see Fig. 1), the Ibaloi are seen as a passive mass listening to exchanges between Toni and the lawyer. Their lands are at stake but the Ibaloi do not talk; they simply applaud Toni's witty arguments for them. Because Toni leads the opposition of the Ibaloi against the mining firm, she is positioned in front of the community members; in a series of shot-reverse-shots that show Toni and the lawyer engaged in argument, Toni's aggressive image is placed in sharp focus against those of the Ibaloi who remain in background blur. Their dependence on Toni extends to Sabel. By killing the lawyer, Sabel avenges Toni's rape, while getting rid of the Ibaloi's enemy. Sabel therefore becomes a heroine among the Ibaloi who confirm this position by maintaining Sabel's innocence although they know she is guilty of murder. When the Ibaloi finally speak through one witness,[2] they do this to defend someone who has done them good and not to articulate their own predicaments.

Figure 2. Sabel as central figure in the performance of an Ibaloi dance.

In addition to the binary opposition of activity and passivity, infantilization in this film also takes on a spatial trope which posits that Ibaloi life is peripheral. The film relies on the Ibaloi to provide a space where Sabel works out the conflicts besetting her personality, but these people remain largely nameless. The film says little about the Ibaloi characters because it does not engage with them as individual subjects. What happens to them, their land, their culture and traditions is airbrushed as soon as Sabel finally comes to terms with herself. The Ibaloi and their problems serve as sidelights to a film that studies the individual psychology of the main character. Sabel is often isolated in

tight close up shots to call attention to the turmoil of her emotions while the Ibaloi are passed in extreme long shots of their village. And yet, at the end of the film, the Ibaloi hold a feast to thank Sabel for her heroism. Low angle shots of Sabel (see Fig. 2) as she performs the Ibaloi native dance inside a circle formed by the Ibaloi make her the central figure in this occasion which serves as finale to the film.

In *Don't Give Up On Us* (Star Cinema, 2006), the intellectual infancy of the Igorot is established in terms of notions of depth and surface. Lowland culture is presented as deep and profound while highland culture is shallow and superficial. This opposition is apparent in the characterization of the main protagonists Abby, a Manila advertising executive, and Vince, an Igorot singer, who initially dislike each other but fall in love during their search for Sabrina, Abby's brother's runaway bride. This film banks on the notion that opposites attract but in this opposition, the lowlander has the upper hand. Abby has a well paying job; she has definite plans and lives by the clock to meet these plans; she is organized and is particular about details both in the advertisements that her company produces and in her brother's wedding preparations. Vince, on the other hand, is just a part-time singer in a bar; he takes things as they come and is oblivious of time. When they travel to Banaue, Vince confiscates Abby's watch because he is irritated by Abby's habit of constantly checking the time. Their conversations about the difference between lowland and highland life further accentuates the contrast between their characters.

Abby is extremely disappointed when Vince reveals that he earns three thousand pesos a month. She wonders how one could live on this salary, but Vince tells her that life in the highland is simple—if hungry, one could just ask for reject vegetables from the neighbors. The opposition of highland and lowland life is further invoked when Abby finally finds Sabrina in the house of Vince's friend with whom she has fallen in love. She tries to convince Sabrina to return to the city and marry her brother, but when Sabrina insists on staying, Abby tells her: "*Hindi ka pwedeng tumira dito, Sab, masyado kang maarte para sa lugar na ito*" (You can't stay here, Sab, you are too saucy for this place). With this Abby affirms that the highland, just like Vince, lacks urbanity and is thus unfit for people like her and Sabrina. Indeed, it is on account of this lack that she rejects Vince's love when they return to the lowland, acknowledging her emotional entanglement with Vince as a regrettable mistake. Vince later returns her watch, saying she needs it in the world where she rightfully belongs. In highlighting such contradictions, this film maintains the superiority of lowland culture with its higher faculties of foresight and determination while undercutting highland society with its inclination to subsistence and idleness.

Figures 3 and 4. Images of the Ifugao as savage warriors in *Mumbaki*.

Animalization, the second colonialist trope identified by Shohat and Stam (1994), is rooted in a religious and philosophical tradition which drew sharp boundaries between the animal and the human and where all animal-like characteristics of the self were to be suppressed. This is the controlling trope in the film *Mumbaki* (Neo Films, 1996) which tells the story of Joseph, a young Ifugao doctor whose desire to work abroad and marry his sweetheart gets tangled with his family and community obligations. *Mumbaki* animalizes the Ifugao by depicting them as savage warriors hungry for revenge, accepting no other means of settling disputes except through bloodshed. The film emphasizes the bestial character of the Ifugao by calling attention to the violence of their combat. Encounters between warring groups are shown in gory detail,

with blood oozing from wounds inflicted by sharpened bolos. Like treacherous predators, warriors from both sides attack by surprise. They kill without mercy as seen in two instances: the body of Joseph's brother Jimmy is literally butchered to pieces (see Fig. 3), while his cousin Carlos' head is severed and taken to the enemy's camp (see Fig. 4). The ferocity of the Ifugao, the film suggests, is not incidental but deeply rooted in the past. When Joseph is pressed to avenge his father's death, the elders remind him that their clan comes from a line of fearless warriors, and he is brought to a hut (see Fig. 5) where he is shown the weapons used by their fearless ancestors and the skulls of enemies they had slain.

Figure 5. An Ifugao elder shows the skulls of slain enemies in *Mumbaki*.

The bestiality of the Ifugao in the film is accentuated by the image of backwardness. Given to the naïve belief that their gods can cure them, the Ifugao refuse to take western medicine and they hold on to this belief even if their gods fail to save many of them from death. The film also shows the folly of native religion in the scene where Joseph asks his brother why he did not attend a village ritual, and the brother says: "*Pangturista lang yan kuya, nag-aalay sila ng pagkain at inumin sa mga baki ngunit sila rin ang kumukunsumo*" (That [ritual] is only for tourists; they offer food and drink to the gods which they themselves consume). Native religion is also implicated in the bestiality of fighting. After the burial of Joseph's father, his relatives perform a ritual where the elders cut the head of a live rooster and let the headless chicken run toward the person appointed by their gods to avenge the death of Joseph's father. The elders also ask the gods for assistance when their village

attacks their enemies, and when they succeed, the elders offer thanks to the gods in rituals where pigs are sacrificed.

As in *Don't Give Up On Us*, the "backwardness"of the Ifugao is further established through the opposite characteristics of two protagonists coming from different cultures. Although the film allows a break on the general immaturity of mind among the Ifugao through the exceptional case of Joseph the doctor, this character is still significantly trapped in self-centeredness, an infant who needs the tutelage of an outsider like Dr. Lorenzo. Attracted by the promise of huge earnings, Joseph prefers to work in the US rather than serve his people who are suffering from a pneumonia epidemic, with only Dr. Lorenzo ministering to them. The commitment of this doctor to saving the sick and helping to end the dispute between the two warring villages contrasts with Joseph's selfishness. Also, it is the wisdom of this lowland doctor that brings Joseph to his senses. When Joseph decides to finally avenge his father's death, Dr. Lorenzo reproves him: *"Ganyan mo patutunayan ang pagka- Ifugao mo, papatayin mo sila? Kung tunay kang Ifugao, sagipin mo ang kapwa mo Ifugao"* (Do you prove that you are an Ifugao by killing your enemies? If you are a true Ifugao, save your fellow Ifugao). In helping Joseph overcome his selfishness and saving the helpless Ifugao villagers from the epidemic, Dr. Lorenzo is in the same mold as Toni and Sabel—they are the necessary redeemers from the outside. Dr. Lorenzo appears even more heroic because his death unites the two warring villages and inspires Joseph to devote himself to his people.

Confronting intellectual immaturity

As a body of self-representative work by Igorot filmmakers, Cordillera vernacular films create images of the Igorot which oppose the dominant tropes that describe the Igorot in Philippine mainstream cinema. One strategy that these films deploy to undertake this project of opposition is the presentation of stories that foreground Igorot characters who are active agents in defining their lives. This is seen in *Laton Pay Dedan* (It Will Be All Right; VVM, 2001) which is about three cousins—Doming, Nestor and Osing—and their attempts to transcend the limits imposed by their circumstances. In relating the success story of Doming and Nestor, this film emphasizes these characters' self-reliance and determination in the face of poverty. Instead of lamenting and resenting their misfortune, they work hard and make various sacrifices so they could continue with their studies. They toil in their neighbor's farms for extra money; to save, they stay in a small rented house with no electricity and make do with their usual fare of rice and taro. The sacrifices that Nestor and Doming have to bear are further emphasized in this film with the image of scarcity established through dialogue and background

song. While preparing taro for their meals, Nestor and Doming talk about the need to avoid vices. They imagine the amount spent by their cousin Osing on his drinking and how long that amount would have sustained them. As a counterpoint, the background song speaks of the meager earnings of their parents and the hardships they have to endure: "*Adigat nga agpayso, biag ni gardinero, unbuwas kan manibog ni in-esek mo, ajuwanan mun pasiya, ipahat moy kabaedan mosay balbalang nu waray mu Idaho, nu timpun ni pangepit mo kuwan shay mayat presyo ay apoy dedsak m*o, *ngem nu timpun ni mu pandaho kuwan shay bagsak presyo* (The life of farmers is difficult; you wake up early to water your crops, you do your best to take care of them hoping that you have something to sell; at harvest time, they tell you that the price of vegetables is favorable but when you bring your crops for sale, they tell you that the price has gone down).[3] By showing the difficulties that Doming and Nestor have to undergo, the film emphasizes that their attitude and conduct are anything but infantile. Although they are weighed down by their family's impoverished circumstances, they neither complain nor blame anyone for their misfortune, refusing to be circumscribed by their condition. Recognizing early on that obtaining an education is their best chance to advance themselves, Doming and Nestor persevere to finish their schooling.

Figures 6 and 7. Scenes from *Laton Pay Dedan* (It Will Be All Right).

The three cousins are compared in this film through cross-cutting shots of Nestor and Doming busy with their studies and home chores and of Osing having a good time in a videoke bar (see Figs. 6 and 7). The contrast underscores the idea that it is Doming and Nestor's determination that made them successful. However, even though this comparison highlights Osing's failure, Osing is not placed in a bad light altogether. As later scenes reveal, Osing matures, despite his earlier self-indulgence, into a sensible man. He fails to finish his studies and marries early but takes responsibility for the choices he has made. After he marries and realizes the difficulties of having no prospects other

than farming, Osing gets rid of his vices and endures difficult work in the farm to provide for his family. When his wife dies, he takes full responsibility for the care of his children. The change in Osing's life from self-indulgence to responsibility indicates that Osing, like his cousins, also saw the need to transcend the limits of their life situation. If Doming and Nestor struggled against poverty, Osing struggled against his initial lack of good sense. The film indicates then that though they confront different problems and adopt different ways of solving these, the three cousins all actively worked to carve a better future for themselves. Compared to the passive Ibaloi characters in *Sabel* who have to rely on others for their salvation, the characters in *Laton Pay Dedan* redeem themselves. However, *Laton Pay Dedan* does not simply overturn the image of Igorot dependency in mainstream films by assigning random positive traits to its characters. Unlike Vince in *Don't Give up on Us* who is suddenly given an opportunity to be someone through a recording offer, the characters in *Laton Pay Dedan* are shown to have no easy way out of their misfortune. Their traits are therefore shown to have been carved out by their need to confront and overcome difficult circumstances; their traits do not simply emanate from their inherent predisposition to admirable qualities.

Figures 8 and 9. Dominga, the self-reliant protagonist of *Dinada* (Help Carry Each Other's Burdens).

Like *Laton Pay Dedan*, the film *Dinada* (Help Carry Each Other's Burdens; Tricord, 2007) also confronts mainstream cinema's projection of Igorot intellectual immaturity by telling another success story. Like Doming and Nestor in *Laton Pay Dedan*, Dominga, the main protagonist in this film, is shown to be self-reliant. Because her parents are unable to support her studies, she works as a domestic help so she could continue with her schooling (see Figs. 8 and 9). Although she seeks the assistance of other people, she gives justice to these people's help by fulfilling her side of the bargain. When she stays with her aunt in exchange for subsidy for her schooling, she assumes domestic duties in

her aunt's house without complaint, and when she is sent to college by the Tricord organization, she studies conscientiously and graduates ahead of schedule. Furthermore, Dominga demonstrates her prudence when she declines her boyfriend's marriage proposal immediately after their high school graduation. Because his parents own tracks of land in Ifugao, this man claims he could give her a good life, but Dominga refuses the offer, arguing that they should complete their studies first and not simply rely on the generosity of others. By characterizing Dominga in this way, the film asserts that in addition to the protagonist's desire to alleviate her family's living conditions, she also aims to elevate herself through education. The film also affirms her maturity by showing her initiative to repay those who helped her finish school. After college, Dominga becomes a teacher but also devotes a lot of her time to the programs of Tricord. Unlike Vince, the rather impotent protagonist of *Don't Give Up On Us*, she demonstrates ability in effecting change and achieving progress for herself and her community.

Aside from presenting the maturity of the Igorot in Dominga as an individual, the film also ascribes the same value to Dominga's community. Although the people in this community experience financial difficulties, they extend help to each other. This reflection of mutual help in the community is further established in the image of Tricord which figures in the film as a catalyst for the community's well-being. Through a chronicle of Dominga's work with Tricord, the film presents the programs of the organization that attempt to address the problems of people in communities like the lack of capital for farming and the inaccessibility of health services.

In one scene, Dominga is shown explaining the financial assistance programs offered by the organization. She stresses the need for responsible payments for these loans to ensure the continuation of the program. In other scenes , she is seen visiting a community where she demonstrates bee keeping as additional form of livelihood (see Fig. 10), or encouraging the local people to use herbal plants as alternative to commercial medicines and to maintain a communal bank of herbal remedies (see Fig. 11). By showing that Tricord can respond effectively to the specific needs of communities only through the cooperation of community members, the film shows that the solution of community problems depends on the people themselves. As its title suggests, the film believes that progress is achieved through the initiative and mutual help of community members, not through the intervention of outsiders. By the same token, the film shows that progress does not depend on the exceptional attributes of individuals. Although the film uses the success story of Dominga as the central narrative, it emphasizes the involvement of the community in this narrative of achievement. Dominga's success is measured not only in terms of her individual achievements but by the

degree to which they contribute to the social good. The film therefore eschews the mainstream's fixation with a hero-dominated narrative and instead celebrates collective achievement.

Figues 10 and 11. Images of self-reliance and community initiative in *Dinada*.

In addition to the image of a cooperative that calls attention to collective action, *Dinada* also employs orality to emphasize collective survival. In this film, orality takes the form of storytelling among characters who share similar experiences. The recurrence of similar patterns in the stories (like difficulties in putting oneself through school) suggests significant affinities—the story of the female protagonist becomes the story of everyone else in her community, and the stories of people in her community become hers as well. The hushed tones, pauses, repetitions and bursts of emotion that mark the stories told by the characters further indicate the commonality of these experiences. Thus, even if the narrative of this film is constructed around Dominga's story, it tells the collective history of a community. It speaks of this community's common struggles, which, in turn, become the fabric of solidarity among the members. Instead of being delivered out of their miseries by benevolent outsiders, the members of this community "help carry each other's burdens." This film, in effect, creates a kind of village or extended family esthetic to foster a collective space.

The emphasis of the film on collective spirit is carried out with the manipulation of space rather than time. Here, time is not rushed; the film dwells on long takes and repetition of images and scenes. There are long takes, for instance, of characters telling their stories, and these sequences show recurring instances of people crying after momentary silence in between attempts to tell a coherent story of their life struggles. In addition, the use of wide-angle shots of long duration calls attention to the characters' sense of community. Such procedures contrast with mainstream films' preoccupation with rapid pacing and editing techniques, which are rooted in a preoccupation with the commercial value of time and on the idea that "non-dramatic" elements in film are

"cinematic excess," i.e., they serve no unifying purpose (Gabriel 1990). But this "cinematic excess" is deployed in *Dinada* because in this film, it is the importance of collective engagement and action that matters, not the consideration of spectators becoming bored and impatient.

In the process of confronting mainstream cinema's stereotypical image of the Igorot as intellectually deficient, *Laton pay Dedan* and *Dinada* engage in what Glauber Rocha (1965) calls "Esthetic of Hunger." Rejecting the luxury of commercial cinema, Rocha advocates the creation of "filmic allegories of underdevelopment" to call attention to dismal social conditions in the Third World. Rocha promotes the transformation of lack in technical resources into an "expressive force" that undermines the bureaucratic hierarchies and alienating images of conventional film production.

Figures 12 and 13. Miserabilism in *Laton pay Dedan* and *Dinada*.

In *Laton pay Dedan* and *Dinada,* Rocha's idea of "miserabilism" characterizes not only the life of the main characters but the conditions of their communities as well. In both films, lack is a nagging presence that impinges on the conversations, decisions and actions of the characters. Scarcity figures prominently in the elements of the mise-en-scene in both films (see Figs. 12 and 13). The settings are rural areas bereft of picturesque sceneries and the amenities of comfortable living. In these settings, residents who subsist on small-time farming live in small houses made of cogon grass and scraps of wood and galvanized iron; they use firewood for cooking, and they wash their dishes and clothes in the river. No places of recreation are seen in these films because most of the residents are too poor to indulge in pleasurable activities. In keeping with the impoverished settings, lighting in these films is austere. In indoor scenes, some human figures appear as silhouettes for lack of appropriate lighting to fill in shadowy spaces. Apparently, the films lack the standard three point lighting system that would have enabled the ample illumination of characters. Sound effects are minimal, like the scraping of the uneven door in the house rented by the cousins in

Laton Pay Dedan, and the sound of knife on a wooden board as Dominga's mother slices sweet potatoes for supper. Rocha (1965) says that such unpleasant sounds and images create violence that opposes "digestive cinema"—films that indulge in happy, funny and fast images of rich people in their luxury cars and magnificent houses. Because the purely commercial aims of these mainstream films are contested by the violence of "hungry films," Rocha believes that this violence is the starting point for understanding the existence of those who lack economic power. According to Rocha, "this violence is not bound to the old colonizing humanism because the love that this violence contains… is not a complacent or contemplative love, but rather a love of action and transformation." In this sense, the images of hunger in *Laton pay Dedan* and *Dinada* call for an understanding of the oppressive conditions and limited opportunities of smalltime farmers who are almost never represented in mainstream cinema. In the rare occasions that it talks about farmers, mainstream cinema usually sentimentalizes them as passive victims, as embodiment of pastoral purity, or as accessories to organized crime as seen in mainstream action films that locate marijuana plantations in the Cordillera. The images of scarcity in both films also contrast with the view of breathtaking mountains and rice terraces peopled with friendly folks in colorful ethnic clothes which are the prevalent images of the Cordillera in commercial films.

In addition to following the line of Rocha's esthetic of hunger, *Laton pay Dedan* and *Dinada* also appears to embody the makings of what Julio Espinosa conceived as "imperfect cinema" which defies the elitist designs of mainstream filmmaking. With the emphasis of these films on the process of overcoming struggles especially through collective work, they oppose the preoccupation of mainstream productions which concern celebration of results and outcomes, which are, more often than not, delivered by exceptional characters the likes of Panday, Darna and Captain Barbel. By taking up themes in what Espinosa calls "problems of those who struggle," these films become the "opposite of a contemplative cinema, the opposite of a cinema which beautifully illustrates ideas or concepts." Espinosa points out that these characters who struggle are "lucid people" who are convinced that they can transform the problems that they experience. They have nothing to do with "narcissistic posture" and they are not interested in the problems of neurosis—concerns which are commonly indulged by mainstream productions.

Foregrounding Igorot Cultural Practice

The peripheralization of the Igorot is another way in which mainstream films show the intellectual insignificance of these people. Usually,

mainstream films employ Igorot rituals as curious sidelights to otherwise formulaic stories. The vernacular films contest this peripheralization of the Igorot in mainstream films by taking Igorot cultural practice as theme. This is apparent in the film *Kedaw*[4] (The Request; VVM, 2007), about a healing ritual of the same name. The film reflects on this healing practice by combining fiction and documentary. The fictional story provides the occasion for the exchange of thoughts among various people who comment as the events in the fictional story unfold. The film combines shots taken in the staged performance of the ritual, seen in the fictional narrative, and footages of actual ritual performances, but disorientation is avoided with spatial manipulation through cutting. The film employs the Kuleshov Effect, "a series of shots that in the absence of an establishing shot creates a spatial whole by joining disparate spatial fragments" (Bordwell and Thompson 1990, 216). When the man in the fictional narrative dreams of his father telling him to replace his coffin and blanket, for instance, the film shifts to documentary mode with a priest explaining the practice of *Kedaw*. As the native priest continues, footages of a grave being dug and a coffin being unearthed are interspersed. A scene showing pigs being slaughtered cuts to a scene of the fictional couple being prayed over by a native priest with the wooden implement used to kill the pigs. Through this technique, the film carries out its aim of inquiring on the practice of *Kedaw* according to ideas expressed by individuals who come from different perspectives without creating spatial confusion.

Bakhtin's concept of language as the space of confrontation of differently oriented social accents is useful in looking at the sentiments expressed by the non-diegetic characters in the film. The Bakhtinian term 'heteroglossia' refers to the competition of discourses. According to Bakhtin, the languages composing heteroglossia represent "bounded verbal-ideological belief systems, points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing social experience, each marked by its own tonalities, meanings and values"(Bakhtin in Stam 1989, 50). Following Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia, it can be noted that languages spoken by the non-diegetic characters represent conflicting ideological beliefs. The native priests' faith in the healing power of the ritual is based on their own system of belief in deities and spirits and on their experience of their ancestors' practices. On the other hand, the church leaders call upon Christian doctrines to argue that the performance of this ritual is diabolical. They also object to the performance of this ritual because of what they see as impractical means taken by those who perform it. Although the exchange of sentiments in this film is dominated by a certain perspective, the presence of competing voices in it permits several voices to be heard. The film is structured as a collective narration where voices either affirm or criticize this cultural practice. This contemplation insists on an understanding of native practice as opposed to the

mainstream's tendency to use cultural practices as mere curiosities. The film also contextualizes the practice of this healing ritual by having a native priest explain how and why the ritual is done. In the context of Foucault's idea of subjugated knowledge, this film takes on an archeological role by unearthing knowledge from native priests who lead traditional practices but who are not usually acknowledged. According to Foucault "subjugated knowledges enable us to comprehend something which is altogether different, a whole set of knowledges dismissed as inadequate, naïve knowledges located at the bottom rung of the hierarchy of cognition and scientificity" (Foucault 1972, 43). In mainstream films, native priests are shown performing some kind of ritual but they are never given a chance to explain. By allowing the native priests to speak about the healing practice (see Figs. 14 and 15), the film acknowledges their authority and thereby eschews the trend in mainstream films in which lowlander's knowledge of civilizations "rescues" the past from oblivion. The film also recognizes a "bottom up" history conveyed through the memory of elderly native priests. Customary knowledge is traditionally disqualified as legitimate knowledge because it lacks the system needed to be categorized as science. This film, however, suggests that history can also take the form of oral accounts passed on from generation to generation.

Figures 14 and 15. Native priests explain healing practice in *Kedaw*.

Confronting Animalization

If the earlier films attempt to challenge the intellectual immaturity of Igorots, the film *Ti Nangisalakan* (The Savior; VVM, 2000) confronts the image of animalization which presents the Igorots as savages. This film registers its opposition to the dominant image of animalized Igorots by foregrounding the inclination of Igorot characters to peaceful living. The film tells the story of brothers Ayudok and Duligan whose father is killed by members of their rival village and their efforts to stop violent inter-village rivalries. This film challenges the animalization of Igorots by presenting images which contrast sharply with those found in films

like *Mumbaki*. One significant contrast presented by this film is the characterization of Ifugao villagers. If in *Mumbaki*, the Ifugao are shown as fierce and merciless people, in this film, the Ifugao are shown to have regard for peace. Although, like *Mumbaki*, this film shows that the Ifugao are bent on revenge, it also suggests that these people recognize the ill effects of vengeful fighting between their villages. In this film (see Figs.

Figures 16 and 17. Community consultation in *Ti Nangisalakan*.

16 and 17), community consultations in both villages predominate; the community members discuss ways to stop the fighting and these dialogues indicate the members' desire to address this problem. They act on this desire by initiating negotiations with their rivals for peaceful coexistence. The conduct of the negotiations indicates the Ifugao characters' sincerity in their purpose. The members of each group sit down in opposite directions facing each other. After medium long shots that establish common space, medium shots in long takes dwell on the calm exchange of propositions spoken by representatives of both groups which are mostly prefaced with inquiries about the other party's sentiment. The long takes in these negotiations indicate the seriousness of the matter; unhurried time allows the members of each village to express their opinions and to consult each other on the propositions offered.

The cordial conduct of negotiation for peace in *Ti Nangisalakan* contrasts significantly with the one presented in *Mumbaki* (see Figs. 18 and 19). In this "dialogue," the members of the feuding villages also sit in opposite directions facing each other, but between them stands an old man who serves as mediator. Apparently, the negotiation does not go well because the mediator shouts: "*Nag-uusap tayo upang pag-usapan ang lunas kung sakaling meron pang nalalabing lunas sa alitan ng magkabilang panig ngunit kung kapwa kayo magmamatigas at hindi magbibigayan....*" (We are having this dialogue to find a solution, if indeed there is still a solution to the feuding of both sides, but if you both remain stubborn....). Joseph's uncle suddenly stands and says, "*Kami*

ang inutangan ng buhay" (We were robbed of a life). The leader of the other party stands too and replies, *"Wala kaming inutang na buhay, naningil lang kami.…"* (We didn't take a life, we just took back what you owed us.…). Carlos stands and shouts, *"Sinungaling!"* (Liar!) to the old man. The old man's son stands and shouts back to Carlos,*"H'wag mong matawag-tawag na sinungaling ang ama ko"* (Don't call my father a liar). The two begin to hit each other but they are held back by their own

Figures 18 and 19. Negotiation that goes awry in *Mumbaki*.

companions. Joseph's uncle concludes: *"Walang saysay ang usapang ito"* (This conversation will lead to nowhere), and both parties depart in opposite directions. The confrontational stance of this negotiation indicates the insincerity of the parties involved. Joseph's uncle confirms this insincerity when he says to Joseph *"H'wag mong sabihing di ka namin pinagbigyan"* (Don't tell us we didn't grant your wishes). The uncle indicates that his group agreed to attend the negotiation only to grant Joseph's request. By showing that negotiations are held out of genuine desire for reconciliation contrary to the charade in *Mumbaki*, *Ti Nangisalakan* shows a change in the Ifugao characters from being vengeful fighters to committed keepers of peace. Through this, the film avoids freezing the Ifugao characters in an animalized state. Since this change comes from the Ifugao themselves, the film indicates that these people have the capacity to think and act for their welfare. Therefore, aside from challenging the animalized figure of the Ifugao in films like *Mumbaki, Ti Nangisalakan* also disputes the Ifugao's dependence on outsiders for their well-being.

The Ifugao are further freed from their animalized state when the film refuses the conception in *Mumbaki* that the Ifugao are predisposed to barbarity because this trait goes back to their ancestors. When the film shows that the disturbance of peace between the two villages after the peace pact is due to Ayudok's drunken misbehavior, it shows that either village has no ultimate control over its members' behavior but in no way does it say that either village is predisposed to savagery. The

execution of Duligan is also shown as an act of keeping the agreement between the two villages.[5] In this context, Duligan's execution is an act of justice, not of revenge.

In addition to showing the Ifugao's desire for peaceful coexistence and justice, *Ti Nangisalakan* also challenges the animalized representation of the Ifugao in the mainstream by de-emphasizing violence. In the film there are only two encounters between the rival groups as opposed to the seemingly endless fighting in *Mumbaki*. The film also minimizes the use of weapons in the fight scenes. When the group led by Ayudok attacks some men from their rival village, the fighters agree to have hand to hand combat. In this fight, therefore, the prominent image and sound are flexed muscles and grunts not bleeding wounds and gunshots. Furthermore, violence is de-emphasized in the film with the use of metonymical images. In the scene where members of the rival village carry out the punishment of death accepted by Duligan, a medium close up shot shows a bolo raised by a hand above Duligan's head; this is followed by a close up shot of Duligan's wriggling leg. The shot ends when Duligan's leg stops wriggling. These shots show only parts of the scene but their frame and sequence suggest the scene's potential violence. But having suggested the image of violence with the objects, frames and sequence of the shots, the film avoids the need to show anything violent. As a result of this refusal to make a spectacle out of violence, the film gives more emphasis on the Ifugao characters' efforts for peaceful living. In doing so, the film casts a different light on a group of people who are represented as barbaric in mainstream cinema.

Reinscribing the backwardness of native religion

While the vernacular films promise new ways of seeing the Igorot people, they nevertheless fail to resist prevailing ideas about the Igorot in mainstream cinema. Key to this failure is the primary purpose why most of these films were made which is the strengthening of Christian conviction. With this purpose, most of the films privilege Christian ways of seeing in the formulation of images in these films. As a consequence, most of the films dwell on the rejection of native religion.

The dismissal of native religion is most apparent in *Kedaw* and *Laton pay Dedan* which engage traditional practices of healing. In *Laton Pay Dedan*, the means by which a native priest finds cure for an illness is shown to be based on speculation. When the native priest is consulted in his house about the illness of Osing's wife, Salina, he divines the cause and cure by using a black padlock tied to a string (see Fig. 20). With his two hands, he holds the padlock up to his chest and invokes the supreme god Kabunian and the other gods—Kabigat, Balitok, Pe-

Figure 20. A native priest divines the cause of illness with a padlock in *Laton pay Dedan*.

Figure 21. A medical doctor examining x-ray plates in *Laton pay Dedan*.

ey, Suyan and Bangan—to reveal to him the cause of the woman's illness by making the padlock move. The native priest mentions several probable causes and the padlock moves when he says that one of the gods may have been offended; to appease his anger, a sacrificial feast must be offered. The native priest's means of diagnosing the sick is contrasted with the methods of a doctor consulted by Salina and Osing. The consultation takes place in a clinic with a desk and two chairs. On the wall, behind the doctor's desk, are wooden shelves with glass panes, filled with thick books and framed diplomas. On the lower part of the

wall are posters of the human anatomy while on the adjacent wall is a white panel displaying several x-ray plates. The doctor is shown examining these plates (see Fig. 21), then he sits down and calmly tells Salina and Osing that there is a tumor in Salina's brain. He tells the couple that he could recommend Salina for operation in a bigger hospital in the city, but is hesitant to do so as the cancer has spread and an operation might just be a waste of money. He prescribes medicines for relief from pain but makes no guarantee about Salina's survival, admitting that doctors have limited abilities to cure terminal illnesses. Through the juxtaposition of scenes at the native priest's house and at the clinic, the film suggests that the native priest's diagnosis is not convincing because it is based on speculation, while the doctor's diagnosis is credible because it is based on scientific evidence. Close up shots of the native priest holding up the padlock show heavily veined and wrinkled hands, implying that the padlock could have moved because of the old man's inability to hold it firmly. This framing adds doubt on the credibility of the native priest's findings. Furthermore, the native priest is confident that his prescription will cure Salina's illness while the doctor is hesitant about making promises because he recognizes the odds against the patient's survival. But in the end, the native priest is shown to have added damage to injury because he prescribed an expensive cure for a disease that is incurable in the first place. By questioning the credibility of the native priest, this film

Figures 22 and 23. Intoxicated participants of the *day-eng* ritual in *Laton pay Dedan*.

replicates colonial thought perpetuated in mainstream films that native religion is mere superstition; its means of healing is a world remote from medical science with its complex instruments and rigorous methods of logical analysis.

Aside from questioning the native priest's means of healing, the film further discredits native religion by presenting the healing ritual

as a confluence of noise, filth and violence. Included in the healing ritual is the practice called *day-eng* where old men and women gather to chant for the well-being of the family and the healing of the sick. In this film, however, the *day-eng* degenerates into rowdy arguments among those gathered because most of them are intoxicated, with close up shots (see Figs. 22 and 23) showing two of the loudest old men, one gulping down a bowl of rice wine, the other scolding his companions for not believing his story. Because noise dominates in this gathering, the purpose of the ritual performance appears to be defeated. The old men seem to be more concerned with affirming their own opinions rather than ensuring the welfare of the family on whose behalf they are performing the ritual.

The image of drunkenness in this film also heightens the animalistic tendencies of the old men and by extension of Igorot men in general. The men's boisterousness due to intoxication confirms the rationale of the liquor prohibition law on non-Christian tribes passed by the Philippine Commission in 1907. This law banned all non-Christians from purchasing, drinking, or possessing intoxicating liquor other than local beverages made in Cordillera villages. Furthermore, the law stipulated that any member of a non-Christian tribe convicted

Figure 24. Sacrificial pigs in *Laton pay Dedan*.

of possessing liquor other than locally produced highland native wines faces a penalty of up to ± 200 in fines and six months imprisonment (Finin 2005). In the words of the judge who sentenced a Baguio resident known as Cayat in 1937 for breaking the liquor ban, allowing the non-Christians to drink "would be tantamount to giving them liberty to commit the bloodiest orgy." The jurist concluded, "It is precisely to

minimize, if not stop, such killings caused by tribal warfare and intoxication that Act 1639 was passed" (Finin 2005, 123). Although the intoxication of old men in this film does not lead to a bloody encounter, it reinforces the notion of non-Christian Igorot men as degenerate individuals.

In addition to the noise from the drunken old men, noise in this occasion also comes from the animals offered as sacrifice (see Fig. 24). Several pigs are lined up on the ground and these are killed after the native priest intones his prayers. Each pig is held by one man while another slit the upper part of the pigs' front leg with a *bolo* (machete). Each of the men who made the slits pierces each pig with a sharp wooden implement and as they do so, the pigs bleed, writhe and squeal until they die. The simultaneous squealing of the pigs creates a deafening cry of helplessness and this calls attention to the cruel manner in which they are killed. But the native priest appears indifferent to this cruelty as he gets one of the wooden implements and smears the blood on the cheeks of the family members after he prays over them. It appears absurd that something used for killing becomes the native priest's instrument in calling protection for the family. By showing that the ritual includes the cruel sacrifice of animals, this film reinforces the prevailing conception that native religion is "insufficiently sublimated," hence culturally backward.

In addition to its emphasis on the noise and violence of the ritual, the film discredits this manner of healing by calling attention to unhygienic practices that attend its performance. After the pigs are roasted and washed, they are laid on cogon grass spread on the ground. Several men slice and dunk the meat into large vats for cooking. These men handle food but do nothing to ensure that unclean elements like hair, saliva, or perspiration do not mix with the food. Furthermore, close up shots show bare hands putting blackened tin cans inside jars to get rice wine. Close up shots also show flies hopping around meat slices while the native priest prays over food laid on cogon grass spread on the ground. By showing that the performance of the ritual is replete with such unsanitary practices (which may cause diseases), the film implies that the performance of the ritual as an effective means of curing an illness is hard to believe. A healing ritual is also meant as an act of cleansing as in the tradition of Israelites during the Passover but in this film, negative images of noise, violence and filth which are attributed to native religion cast doubt on the authority of the native priest, on the value of the ritual, and on the practice of native religion.

A similar pattern of negative attributions to native religion appears in the film *Kedaw*. Like in *Laton pay Dedan,* the native priest's means of knowing the cure for the main protagonist's illness is presented as guesswork. In this film, the native priest bases his prescription on his interpretation of the main protagonist's dream. His interpretation of

the dream also appears to be quite literal. Because the dead father in the dream is naked and he tells his son to change his blanket and coffin, the native priest indicates that these requests should be granted in order for the man to be cured. The native priest's interpretation of the dream is attacked by the first non-diegetic character that appears in the film. According to this pastor, the main protagonist's dream is, in fact, Satan's way to trick people into sin. By saying this, the pastor indicates that the native priest is too naïve to recognize forms of deceit. The native priest's dependence on interpretation of a dream as means of knowing a cure for an illness is therefore made to appear foolish.

In addition to casting doubts on the credibility of the native priest's way of knowing a cure, the film establishes the absurdity of *Kedaw* by portraying this ritual as the cause of scarcity among those who perform it. To have money for the performance of the ritual, the main protagonist and his wife borrow money from their rich neighbor. They spend the money for the performance of the ritual but the sick man does not recover. When on the appointed day the neighbor goes to their house to seek payment for their debt, the wife has to offer their farm as payment because her husband has not been well enough to work and earn money. In addition to losing their farm, the couple also have to ask their children to stop going to school because they can no longer afford to pay for their schooling. When the children see their playmates heading for school, they resent their parents for spending much money on the performance of the ritual. These difficulties that the diegetic family experiences out of what the pastor considers as unreasonable expense on the performance of *Kedaw* are also mentioned by the old woman who appears as a non-diegetic character. She says that her family incurs debts because of expenses in performing the ritual every time a family member gets sick. The neighbor who preaches to the couple has similar sentiments. He says that when he was still in the old belief, he spent much more than the couple did. He exclaims, "*Palalo adi, wat utot di adak pinalti*" (It was too much; it was only rat that I was not asked to offer) to emphasize the extent of his expenses. By choosing converted Christians to speak of their experiences to show that the native ritual is an expensive yet futile exercise, the film points to the excess and irrationality of native religion. The testimonies of these characters are employed as a way of validating the film's critique of the old practice. The film does not allow any doubt on its rejection of native religion by not showing instances when those who performed this ritual were healed and were able to rise above poverty and by ending the film with the family going to church. The man is cured after his acceptance of Christianity and his healing is indicated by his transformation from an old looking, bedridden man to a smiling, newly bathed middle-aged man who leads his family to church. This final scene overtly dismisses traditional belief and validates Christian conversion

Figures 25 and 26. An orphan girl supports herself by doing odd jobs in *Gasat* (Fate).

Reinscribing intellectual immaturity

Intellectual immaturity is observed in the film *Gasat (*Fate; IFP, 2007*)* which tells the story of Wina and her mother as they try to deal with their privation. Like the stories of Doming, Nestor and Dominga but even more pronounced in its portrayal of life's difficulties, Wina's story presents a person's struggle against adversity. The film's VCD jacket, describes Wina as "*esay parsua ay maki-ib-ibaw sin rigat di biag ta way iyat na kuma ay makadateng sin kagam-is ay gasat*" (one person who fights against the difficulties of life to arrive at good fortune).

Abandoned by her father and later orphaned, Wina supports herself by doing laundry work, serving as farm hand, and selling vegetables in the sidewalks, among others (see Figs. 25 and 26). But despite having to do all these, she manages to study well and she graduates from high school with good grades.

Even if Wina is shown to be self-reliant like the other characters that did well despite their impoverished situations, it appears that she does not belong to the same line because hers seems not to be a story of self-reliance but a reworking of the classic narrative where a prince saves a damsel in distress. When Wina's body gives in to exhaustion, her repentant father suddenly materializes, in time to save her. Contrary to the producer's description of the main protagonist, the film shows that Wina attains good fortune not because she struggles relentlessly but because she is saved by her father who found good fortune in another land. Although the savior in this film is Wina's father himself and not some stranger, he is somewhat equivalent to an outsider who arrives with the resources for Wina's redemption: he is literally an outsider because he came from abroad, and was mostly absent from Wina's life. In a sense, the father appears to embody the narrative role of the western liberator as integral to the colonial rescue fantasy which carries undertones of the inferiority of the Third World. By relying on the

narrative of rescue and by its maneuver to a convenient solution, the film spells dependency instead of self-actualization.

Figures 27 and 28. Scenes from *Nuntala'an Imbabale* (Return of the Child).

Refiguring the Noble Savage

Highland-lowland opposition also figures in the film *Nuntala'an Imbabale* (Return of the Child; VVM, 1994), a Kalanguya version of the biblical story of the Prodigal Son (here given the name Dulnuan). In mainstream cinema, the lowland has the upper hand in this opposition because it is invested with positive attributes which the highland does not possess. In this film, however, this representation is apparently reversed because the lowland is characterized as decadent. First, the lowland is shown to be the place where Dulnuan meets his fall. This image evokes the Christian conception of heaven and hell which indicates that heaven above is the place of salvation while hell below is the place of damnation. The fall of Dulnuan happens both in the literal and metaphorical sense. He is shown (see Fig. 27) descending from his mountain village to the lowland after being enticed by a friend who has traveled to the lowland. When he arrives there (see Fig. 28), he succumbs to the pleasures it has to offer. Aside from being a place of decadence, the lowland is shown as inhabited by people leading dissolute lives. They befriend Dulnuan and lure him to indulge in vices, while exploiting him and conspiring to steal his money. The film, then, reverses the highland-lowland binary to favor the former. The lowland is now the barbaric other that causes the corruption of the highlander. However, this reversal poses the problem of calling upon the colonial conception of difference between highlanders and lowlanders. William Henry Scott notes that "Spanish colonization resulted in the creation of a distinction between lowland submission, conversion and civilization on the one hand with paganism and savagery on the other"(Scott 1974, 40). Although this film resists the stereotype of the highlander as savage by showing that Dulnuan,

his family, and his people are upright, it nevertheless invokes the American colonial conception of the Igorot as a "pure tribe" that needed protection from the largely hispanized lowlanders. The perspective of this film about the corruptive tendencies of the lowland echoes the sentiments of David Barrows who served as chief of the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes in the Philippines. In his "Preliminary Report on the Tribes of the Cordillera Central" Barrows presents strong objections to the idea of Igorot resettlement in the lowlands:

> I am convinced that such a policy as this is in great error. The Igorrotes…gain nothing by being brought into contact with the Christianized Filipino of the valley. The few who have been forced into this proximity have in every case which I have observed lost the courage and independence of the mountaineer and have sunk into a more or less dependent position where their labor is exploited by the Christian Filipino… To bring the Igorrotes down to the plains is simply to depopulate those wonderful hills and to press them toward inevitable extinction. (Barrows in Jenista 1987, 31)

As a result of this American attitude towards the Igorot, the Americans established a special system of direct colonial administration in the Cordillera. In this sense, the highland is a protected home where Dulnuan later returns for salvation. By reversing the highland-lowland opposition, this film resists the representation of mainstream films that always characterizes highlanders with some form of either lack or excess. Because the film relies on a simple reversal of a prevailing colonial conception, the film fails to create a more complex representation of the Igorot.

Lowland-highland opposition is also seen in *Din Sungbat* (The Answer; VVM, 2003) which relates the life of Igorot families that moved to different places in the Cagayan Valley region. Similar to the film *Nuntala'an Imbabale*, this film depicts the highland as pure and the lowland as corrupt. With its documentary style, it treats highland-lowland opposition as a matter of fact. The film's narrator, objective and detached in tone, presents as truth the observation that when young people from the highland become acquainted with lowland lifestyle, their values are corrupted. Describing the children of Igorots who have migrated to the Cagayan Valley area, the narrator says: "*Gapu ta naipulapol da sin Kailokuan, natural ay maalinan da sin style di panagbiag das di, maila sin panagbadbado ya panagkalkali da. Gapu abe ta ad-adu di makaawis ay mail-ila das na, pilit ay wada en daida di mailaw-an*" (Because they interact with lowlanders, they are naturally infected with lowland lifestyle, this can be seen in the way they dress and talk. Also, because of many attractive things that they see here, some get into trouble). The

narrator associates the lowland with a disease that contaminates the young highlanders. Furthermore, the narrator sees the corruptive quality of the lowland as something that is natural. In addition to the corruption of migrant children after their contact with lowland lifestyle, this film also affirms the idea of a corruptive lowland culture by showing that the destruction of one family is caused by the father's relationship with a woman from the lowland (see Fig. 29). The degenerate qualities of the mistress heightens the idea that the lowland is corrupt because the man's wife (who is a highlander) is shown as exactly her opposite.

Figures 29 & 30. Lowland-highland relations in *Din Sungbat* (The Answer).

Although *Din Sungbat* invokes the lowland-highland opposition, it is somewhat ambivalent with regard to this opposition. The film indicates that lowland lifestyle corrupts the values of highland children and erodes their native culture, but at the same time, shows lowlanders saving the highlanders from distress. For instance, when the children of the unfaithful father can no longer bear their father's irresponsibility (see Fig. 30), they seek help from one of the sibling's godfather who is a lowlander. Lamenting the change in their father's conduct, this man allows the siblings to stay in his house. He entrusts to them the care of his ranch and tells them that they will have their own share of the profits when the animals are sold. The film also shows that the mother of this family is employed by lowlanders. In her conversation with her neighbor when she returns to take her children, the mother says that she is treated well by her employers and they have agreed to shelter her children as well.

Aside from showing that lowlanders are sympathetic to the plight of highlanders, the film also indicates that the lowland is a place of better opportunities for people from the highlands. Several details illustrate this. An old man (see Fig. 31) says that his family moved to Quirino to find more productive lands. Their land in Sagubo,[6] he says, could no longer yield enough for his family because it has become

unproductive after constant farming. A woman (see Fig. 32) says her family moved to Nueva Vizcaya because their land in their hometown is not big enough to sustain her children and their own families. Another woman says that they moved to Cordon, Isabela because there they have easier access to the market for their produce. She says that in their place in Kiw-angan,[7] selling their produce takes much time and effort. Commutable roads are absent so they have to carry their produce through narrow mountains trails. The accounts of these migrants affirm

Figures 31 and 32. Igorot migrants talk about their past and present in *Din Sungbat*.

that the highlanders who moved to the lowlands saw better livelihood opportunities and more favorable conditions in these places where they mix quite well with their new neighbors. Thus, while it talks about the negative influences of lowland lifestyle, it also shows how the move to the lowlands has been beneficial to migrants from the hinterlands. Through this ambivalence, the film appears to resist the rigid binary dichotomy seen in *Nuntala'an Imbabale*.

Despite its wider view of the lowland-highland relationship, however, *Din Sungbat* still depends ultimately on binary opposition.

The film features a pastor whose primary reason for moving to the lowlands is to continue ministering to the spiritual needs of the highlanders. Like the American colonialists, the pastor looks at the highlanders as pure souls who have to be guarded against lowland corruption. By maintaining this view, the film resists the characterization of Igorots in mainstream films as fierce people but because it simply overturns the opposition in favor of the highlander, the opposition is reinforced and remains unquestioned. The image of the noble savage is summoned in the service of religious agenda.

By examining the images of the Igorot in vernacular films produced in the Cordillera, this paper illustrates the contradictory results of this film practice. The vernacular films promise alternative representations of the Igorot by showing constructive images such as Igorot characters succeeding through self-reliance and hard work. This runs counter to images of Igorot dependency in mainstream films. The vernacular films also engage in collective history rather than in hero-dominated narrative characteristic of mainstream productions. Furthermore, they also contemplate Igorot cultural practices which are usually used as mere sidelights in mainstream films. But despite these constructive images, the vernacular films reinforce dominant mainstream conceptions of the Igorot by employing Igorot stereotypes established in this industry especially through the master tropes of infantilization and animalization. By failing to resist these prevalent stereotypes, the vernacular films fall short of creating more complex representations of the Igorot. Because the complexities of Igorot culture are simplified in the mainstream and in the vernacular films in order to satisfy the specific purposes of these productions, the Igorots are at the losing end in either way. The production of a truly self-representative body of Igorot films that will rectify this prejudice remains an urgent undertaking.

An enlightened vernacular film practice seems possible when the production of these films is no longer dependent on religious organizations that bank on film production to advance catechetical agenda. Although Christianity has become an integral part of contemporary Igorot society, its generally negative view of indigenous practices hinders Christian film productions from adopting a more culturally informed understanding of native communities. The production of vernacular films must therefore be extricated from sectarian interest and placed in the hands of groups or individuals who look at filmmaking as an integral part of the continuing process of Igorot struggle for self-determination. In this way, vernacular films could contribute insights on Igorot life which go beyond simplistic representations of religious or ethnic differences. The production of culturally sensitive vernacular films may also enable vernacular filmmaking to be reflexive. In addition to looking inward for cultural forms that can be used as resources in the creation of film images, vernacular filmmaking could

also acquire an acute awareness of the varied and oftentimes conflicting self-representations of Igorots and thus avoid making final claims on the community. Enlightened vernacular filmmaking could thus help arrest the historic flood of stereotypical images of the Igorot in mainstream cinema.

NOTES

1. An example of independent film on the Igorot released in 2005 is *Ang Daan Patungong Kalimugtong* by Mes de Guzman. This low budget film set in Benguet presents the daily routine of two orphans who cross mountains, rivers and hanging bridges to get to school and whose other siblings take on odd jobs to support the family. The characters in this film are played by local residents who use Ilocano in their impromptu dialogues.

2. This witness who is an Ibaloi saw Sabel stabbing the lawyer but in his court testimony, he denied having seen the incident and talked instead about how Sabel and Tony helped his community.

3. This song alludes to an early morning program aired on a local radio station which announces the buying prices of vegetables at the Trading Post in La Trinidad, the capital town of Benguet. Aside from noting that farmers do not control the prices of their produce, this song registers the complaints of many farmers who rely on reports aired on the program (because it is sponsored by a government agency) but are disappointed with "incorrect figures" in these reports. Because of numerous complaints, this program has since included a disclaimer that the reported prices may change any time.

4. This ritual is done when a family member suffers from an extended illness which is not cured by medical remedies or cannot be explained by medical practitioners. Such illness is believed to be an indication that a deceased family member wants or needs something (e.g., the deceased wants her/his coffin, blanket, clothes replaced) or a deceased family member has complaints (e.g., her/his grave was disturbed or neglected or living family members have not followed certain instructions). It is further believed that the deceased make their requests or complaints known through the ill person's dreams. Native priests are consulted for the interpretation of these dreams because they are believed to be gifted with this ability or have acquired wisdom that enables them to do so.

5. In one of their meetings, the two villages agreed that if a person harms anyone from the other village, this perpetrator shall be surrendered by her/his village to the injured party which will inflict on him/her the same offense s/he committed. Because Ayudok killed a man from the other village, he was going to be executed but instead of bringing his brother to the other village, Duligan himself went there and volunteered to be killed. Members of the concerned village discussed his proposition and they agreed to execute him for his brother's crime.

6. A barangay in Kapangan, Benguet bordering the province of La Union.

7. Another barangay in Kapangan, Benguet.

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