

Unraveling Identities: Igorotness and “Igorotak” T-shirts

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ABSTRACT

This essay explores the social and cultural context behind the production and consumption of “Igorotak” (I am an Igorot) t-shirts in the Cordillera, northern Philippines, drawing on the works of Stuart Hall and Manuel Castells for its theoretical orientation. Textual analysis and sociological-ethnographic inquiries were conducted. Findings suggest that this latest ‘fashion’ of asserting Igorotness came from the renewed desire of Igorot people today, particularly young, urban, middle class Igorots, who have migrated out of their hometowns, to identify themselves as originating from one location – the *ili* (hometown). Advancements in clothing, information, and communications technology have subsequently allowed enterprising community members to fulfil and extend this desire by designing a practical creation that is easily marketed through translocal social networks. These historical ‘moments’ have, it is argued, allowed the t-shirt to become a symbol of *post-resistance Igorotness*, one that aims to organize itself beyond resisting actual and perceived forms of oppression, toward the potential articulation of the postmodern aspirations of the diasporic Igorot community.

Keywords: Igorotness, ethnicity, identity consumption, resistance identities

Introduction

According to Stuart Hall (1997), “the most profound cultural revolution in this part of the twentieth century has come about as a consequence of the margins coming into representation.” In the era of globalization that has favored some and excluded others, marginalized groups have struggled against omission from, and deleterious representations in, the dominant narrative and have also fought to “reclaim some form of representation themselves” (183).

One such reclamation can be seen in the production and consumption of “statement” items by the marginalized, who desire to counter prevailing stereotypical representations of themselves and their ways of life. These cultural goods (e.g. “Come out, come out, wherever you are” t-shirts that became emblematic of the US gay movement in the 1970s, “Black is beautiful” products) have, over the past decades, become important—in some cases, decidedly iconic—symbols of empowerment.

Increasingly ubiquitous in the Cordillera region of the Philippines are t-shirts with the letters spelling “IGOROTAK” boldly printed up front. These t-shirts have appeared not only on the shelves of souvenir shops in tourist areas but have also become fashionable wear for local people strolling along the streets of the urban center of Baguio, even for local politicians and celebrities desirous of high public visibility. To a curious observer, an explanation on the back of the t-shirt reads: “Igo.rot.ak: statement asserting one’s ethnic origin, as in I am an Igorot!”

This declaration, along with the existence of the t-shirt itself, raises questions about Igorot identity, and more generally, cultural identity and “ethnic origin.” What does it mean in this day and age to ‘assert’ one’s identificatory affiliations? Why the compulsion to assert them now? What does this phenomenon suggest about “Igorotness” today?



Figures 1 and 2. Photos of Naduma’s Igorotak t-shirt (front and back)

This essay explores these questions using the lens of cultural studies and utilizing sociological and anthropological methods of inquiry. Such an interdisciplinary approach draws mainly from the work of Stuart Hall on cultural identity (1990; 1996a; 1997), and secondarily, from Manuel Castells’ work on identity and the Network Society (2004). The methodology takes its cue from Pertti Alasuutari’s hourglass model (1996), a cultural studies approach to qualitative research that begins with broad theoretical frameworks as the

"inspiration" for understanding a socio-cultural phenomenon, which is then analyzed through specific cases that capture or reveal a "local and historically specific cultural or 'bounded' system" (Alasuutari 1996, 372). With this method, cases are chosen strategically based on their relation to the broader population, and responses guide the researcher toward discussing the "cultural logic" behind certain structural changes in society relevant to the broader phenomenon under study—in this instance, the proliferation of the "Igorotak" t-shirt and what this suggests about present-day assertions of and about Igorot identity.

Igorot Identity Revisited

Citing seminal works by William Henry Scott and Dean Worcester, Deirdre McKay (2006) provides a detailed historical account of how the word "Igorot" evolved from a description imposed by the Spanish colonial administration to a legitimate—i.e. legally recognized—identity invoked by indigenous Cordillera peoples to advance claims on ancestral domains and rights to natural resources. Igorot identity may thus be viewed as an "imposed racialization," (Balibar and Wallersten 1991), which eventually saw expression as self-racialization.

The history behind Igorot identity-formations, in terms of what Manuel Castells (2004) would classify as a legitimizing identity, cuts across two successive colonial pasts (Spanish/American) down to independence and modern Philippine jurisprudence. It has been well-documented that the term "Igorot" derived from "Ygolot" or "Ygorotes," which Spanish colonizers coined in reference to unsubjected pagans residing in the mountains close to the Ilocos region (Scott 1985, 257; McKay 2006, 294). Literally, however, Igorot simply meant "people from the mountains." Owing to the reported acts of resistance of the Cordillera peoples against colonization, along with the documented practices of 'savagery' like head-hunting among certain communities, the term came to denote an exotic and recalcitrant otherness (Scott 1985, 40).

With the American colonial administration's re-mapping and reclassifications of its subject populations, the *Ygorotes* became collectively identified as a 'tribe' occupying what was then known as the Mountain Province, which was administered and managed by the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes (McKay 2006, 296; Finin 1991, 912; as cited in Labrador 1997, 4). Famously or notoriously, it was under the Americans that Igorots were displayed as part of "The Philippine Reservation" at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, as a showcase of 'the white man's burden,' which is to say, a symbolic

reminder to Americans of their moral obligation to bring civilization to their presumably benighted colonies.

In the years leading up to formal Philippine independence, McKay (2006) notes that the geographical and cultural divide between Igorots and the rest of the Filipinos was reinforced by nationalist figures like Carlos P. Romulo, who once infamously declared that “the Igorots are not Filipinos” (298). By ‘Filipinos,’ Romulo ostensibly meant the Christianized majority. Over time, under post-independence regimes, the word Igorot was sedimented into what Van Dijk (2002) calls ‘everyday text and talk’—i.e. legal and parliamentary proceedings, educational textbooks, mass media messages, and in-group conversations. Officially, ‘Igorot’ has since been used to collectively refer to eight indigenous ethnolinguistic groups located in the Cordillera region. The *Encyclopædia Britannica* (2015) defines the word as “any of various ethnic groups in the mountains of northern Luzon, Philippines, all of whom keep or have kept, until recently, their traditional religion and way of life.”

The assertion of an Igorot identity by people who were by then only officially referred to as Igorots is said to have come about as a result of the people’s opposition to massive development projects in the Cordillera uplands. These projects were introduced by Ferdinand Marcos’ dictatorial regime and its aggressive modernization agenda, which included grand aspirations for “the advancement of ‘backward’ peoples” (Dorall and Regpala 1982, 256). As McKay explains (2006), the obduracy of these colonial-era cultural distinctions was refunctioned by the Igorots themselves to justify their own “nationalist hopes for resource-based development in the mountains” (300). During this time, the threats of large-scale hydroelectric dams and logging projects motivated an otherwise splintered geographical region to unite under the banner of a collective resistance identity known as *Kaigorotan*. Peoples from Ifugao, Kalinga, Apayao, Mountain Province, Benguet, and Abra identified themselves as Igorot and used this collective identity to claim their collective rights to develop their ancestral lands and resources in ways that were consistent with their own cultures (Maranan 1987). In this sense, Igorot became a *resistance identity* or that which is constituted “in terms of dominant institutions/ ideologies, reversing the value judgment while reinforcing the boundary” (Castells 2004, 9).

McKay (2006) notes that, owing to the Igorot people’s successful opposition campaigns and the prominent roles they played in the national and international struggles for the recognition of indigenous peoples’ rights, they are today reputed to be resourceful social and human rights campaigners who, with fluency and force, are able to

articulate their concerns about important social issues, including those relating to identity, on any global stage.

The Social and Cultural Context of Igorot Identity

The evolution of Igorot identity from an imposed colonial categorization to a collective sub-national identity organized to resist state-sponsored 'development aggression,' and more generally, to a technical term for a group of indigenous peoples inhabiting a certain territory illustrates Stuart Hall's view on cultural identity as a "production, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" or discourse (1990, 222)—something "subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (225). In the continuing transformations of Igorot identity, the Igorotak t-shirt is, arguably, the most recent tangible marker and a material evidence of the expressed need among Igorot peoples to represent themselves on their own terms (rather than remain as objects of others' representations).

According to Hall (1996a), cultural identity is defined not only in terms of similarities and unities, but in terms of difference and exclusion (i.e. by what it is and what it is not), relative to other marginal identities or to the dominant identity. Thus, cultural identities need to be understood and appreciated as "produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices by specific enunciative strategies" (4). Igorotness is an identity that peoples rooted in the Cordillera region, which they have inhabited for ages (the "ethnic origin"), may willingly adopt, as amply demonstrated in its colonial and modern evolution as a term. But it is also about setting themselves apart from other Filipinos to highlight their distinct history and culture, and claim their right to self-determination. Their strategic forms of unity in the face of certain historical contingencies may be seen as "constructed within the play of power and exclusion, and are the result, not of a natural and inevitable or primordial totality but of a naturalized, overdetermined process of 'closure'" (Hall 1996a, 5). This process can be understood as the act of setting limits by defining who is and is not Igorot based on the (discursive) rules they themselves have created or by which they abide. The Igorotness asserted through the Igorotak t-shirt can thus be unifying and exclusive, and more importantly, relevant for the present generation of Igorot peoples who, for one reason or another, feel compelled to make visible and sartorial assertions of their identity.

Following Hall and using his serviceable terms (1996b), we may distinguish three concepts of identity over time: the Enlightenment

subject, the sociological subject, and the post-modern subject. The Enlightenment subject was highly individualist, based on a conception of the independent human being as a “fully centered, unified individual with capacities of reason, consciousness and action” (597). The sociological subject was formed in relation to “‘significant others,’ who mediated for the subject the values, meaning, and symbols—the culture—of the worlds he/she inhabited;” identity here, in a classically sociological sense, is “formed in the ‘interaction’ between self and society” (597) or in the social structures and institutions that order our everyday lives. The post-modern subject, meanwhile, responds precisely to the changes in social structures and institutions that have occurred in modern societies, and continue to occur in the present. The post-modern subject is, thus, “conceptualized as having no fixed, essential, or permanent identity....formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us” (Hall 1987; cited in Hall 1996b, 598). These three concepts, schematic though they may be, can be visualized as a continuum that goes from perceived unity and stability to fragmentation and instability. They help one understand the increasing fluidity, uncertainty, and rootlessness of identity in society today— one that is increasingly interconnected and decentered, globally and locally (Hall 1996b, 623).

Apart from being a production shaped by the ‘play’ of history, culture, and power, as Hall states (1990, 225), identity may be understood as a matter of social context (Castells 2004): “who constructs identity, and for what, largely determines the symbolic content of this identity, and its meaning for those identifying with it or placing themselves outside of it” (7). Identity-building or -production, therefore, always occurs in a context marked by power relationships. In systematically understanding identity-building ventures, Manuel Castells (2004) similarly suggests three types which are distinguished according to origin, purpose, and outcome (7). This typology has descriptive and explanatory value in new efforts to understand Igorot identity, and assertions of it, over time.

Legitimizing identities, the first type, are “introduced by dominant institutions of society to extend and rationalize their domination vis-à-vis social actors;” these are primarily national (and nationalist) identities around which civil society, understood in the Gramscian sense as a body that is “deeply rooted among the people” but nevertheless “[prolongs] the dynamics of the state,” functions (8–9).

Resistance identities, the second type, are created by the “actors who are in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination;” they spur the formation of communes

or communities, including ethnic or cultural ones, in response to oppression, and as a result of "resentment against unfair exclusion, whether political, economic or social" (Scheff 1994, 281; cited in Castells 2004, 9).

Out of the three categories, the third is perhaps the most abstract. *Project identities* arise "when social actors, on the basis of whatever cultural materials are available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in society" (Castells 2004, 10). From creating resistance communities, groups may gradually move to forming collective subjects "through which individuals reach holistic meaning in their experience" (10). A good example is when feminists, as an identity-based group, are united no longer on the basis of oppression alone but by a shared vision and will to transform patriarchal social structures as a whole.

Following Hall's thesis on cultural identity and Castells' types of identity-building, could this latest development in Igorot identity assertion under consideration here indicate a certain shift, from the advancement of the claim of Igorotness as a matter of resistance or a rallying cry (*Kaigorotan*) to the emergence of a transformative subject? Or is it simply a fad, unrelated to questions of identity politics or what Hall had called the margins reclaiming representation?

Study Framework and Methods

Given the inherent subjectivity and characteristic disorderliness of cultural identities, as Hall (1990), Nagel (1994), Geertz (2000) and Castells (2004) have noted, a qualitative approach is most appropriate for this study (Alasuutari 1996; Pickering 2008). In particular, a 'sociological/ethnographic' approach employing qualitative research methods—textual analysis, focus interviews, and focused-groups discussions—was employed. This approach, according to Aeron Davis (2008), is useful in directly investigating the process of cultural production and consumption, and the combination of methods strengthens descriptions and arguments made in relation to assertions of identity through cultural products like the Igorotak t-shirt. This approach emphasizes people's experiences and reflections to decode the phenomenon under study by locating it in broader structures and social and cultural contexts.

Alasuutari's (1996) 'hourglass model' guided the study from conceptualization to data gathering and analysis. This model is suited for a case study of a "local 'bounded system,' contextualized within a larger historical and cultural framework;" it aims not to "formulate a general theory, but rather to shed new light on a historical moment through the case being analyzed" (374). Under

the terms of the hourglass model, theoretical frameworks, such as those by Hall (1990; 1996a; 1997) and Castells (2004), provided inspiration for the researcher in conceptualizing the research and formulating its research questions. During fieldwork or data gathering, the researcher could then incorporate more perspectives, modify or narrow down her hypotheses, or even re-focus her study altogether, based on her resultant observations. In selecting cases or participants, the overriding logic for qualitative inquiry is not representativeness; rather it is relatedness or the extent to which a case relates to a broad population based on historical and cultural contexts (Alasuutari 1996, 376).

The hourglass model is thus about beginning from a broad theoretical framework, then narrowing down to cases, and ultimately analyzing how such cases relate to—and perhaps explain—a broader socio-cultural phenomenon.

Case Study and Participant Selection

The particular case under study is the production and consumption of the Igorotak t-shirt as a cultural product that may be historically linked to assertions of Igorotness. To do this, a textual analysis of the t-shirt was first conducted, keeping in mind how the terms used derive from common codes, terms, and discourses about Igorot identity as it has been formed, asserted, or resisted in the past and present. The analysis aimed to build arguments about the producers of the t-shirt and examine their inherent assumptions about its targeted consumers. Since cultural production cannot be isolated from the culture of production (Davis 2008), the analysis also touches on processes and technology deployed in the creation of the Igorotak t-shirt.

For the interviews and group discussions, it is common knowledge that participant selection presents a major practical challenge in sociological/ethnographic research (Davis 2008; Meyer 2008). For this study, premium was given to self-identifying Igorots, who expressed interest or actively participated in asserting their identity through the use of the Igorotak t-shirt. This strategic selection (Alasuutari 1996) or purposive sampling (Meyer 2008) emphasized quality over quantity in terms of what participants could potentially contribute to discussions and analyses. Thus, responses were deemed valuable not because they were necessarily representative of a bigger population but because they helped significantly in forming “a unified picture of different cultural logics within which the same historical structural conditions are viewed in people’s lived experience” (Alasuutari 1996, 376). In turn, the

interviews conducted therefore shaped the theoretical framework and analyses of the study consistent with how *grounded theory* evolves (Davis 2008) and the terms of the hourglass model. They were not conducted to test out—i.e. confirm or negate—a particular theory or hypothesis.

Following the notion of the case study in the ‘hourglass model’ and to narrow down the scope of the study, focused interviews and group discussions were conducted with Igorot consumers of Igorotak t-shirts. In this study of contemporary assertions of Igorotness, it was important to track how the t-shirt served Igorot respondents, as opposed to the general population, to draw out their views on the use or appreciation of the cultural product vis-à-vis their need to articulate their cultural identity.

Thirty-two interviews (13 males, 19 females) and two focused-group discussions (eight members per group) were conducted. Informants were initially contacted via the “Igorotak” online group, which is publicly accessible on the popular social networking website Facebook. An invitation to participate in this study was posted on the group’s wall. Interested members, who responded by sending a personal message to the researcher, were then sent interview questions via e-mail. Upon receipt of their responses, follow-up chat sessions and face-to-face interviews, when plausible, were scheduled and conducted. Two FGDs were then organized with 16 informants in Baguio City in early 2016.

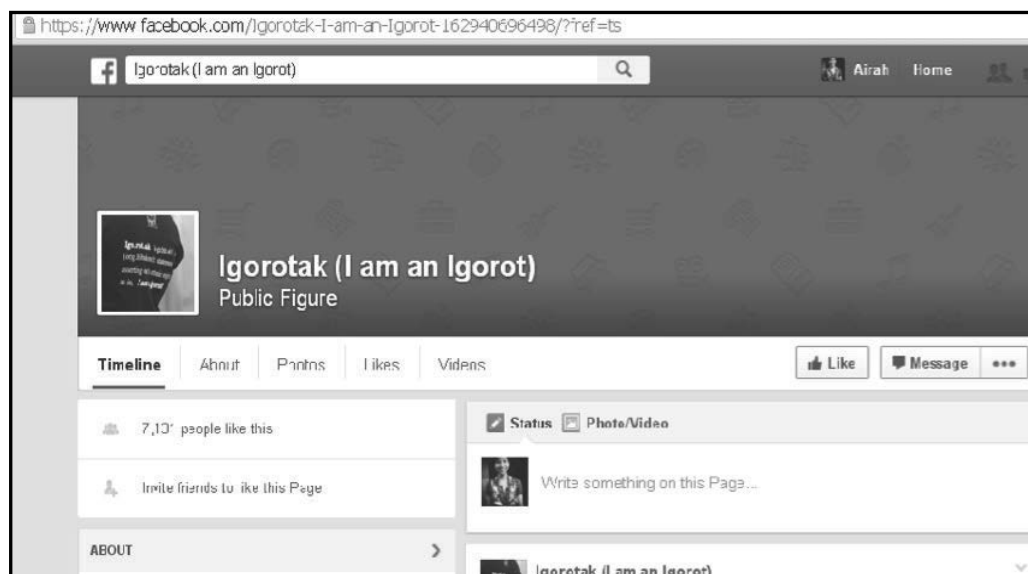


Figure 3. Screenshot of the “Igorotak (I am an Igorot)” Facebook public group (8 November 2015).

The Igorotak T-shirt

The Igorotak t-shirt is believed to have been first produced for sale in 2008 by Naduma, a t-shirt manufacturing and retail business owned by an Igorot family from Mountain Province and operates a vending stall in one of Baguio's major malls (Clarena Cabalda-Ticad 2016; Clarena is store manager of one of Naduma's shops in Baguio, the urban capital of the Cordillera Region in Northern Philippines). Naduma has since mass-produced the t-shirt with a small print indicating "ORIGINAL DESIGN," foregrounding the point that the design has been copied by other Baguio retailers. The t-shirt remains one of the bestselling items in their souvenir shop at the mall.

According to Cabalda-Ticad, they first produced the t-shirt for the "BIBAK Community," a global association of Igorot people based outside the Philippines. BIBAK has chapters in major cities like Los Angeles, Chicago, Toronto, Vancouver, and London. BIBAK stands for Benguet, Ifugao, Bontoc, Apayao, Kalinga—the five sub-regions of the Cordillera recognized during the American colonial period. (Today, the Cordillera Administrative Region is composed of six provinces—Benguet, Mountain Province, Ifugao, Kalinga, Apayao and Abra—and the chartered city of Baguio.) A famous Igorot blogger based in Chicago, sagada-igorot.com, known as Kamulo, who is also a cousin of Cabalda-Ticad, has observed that the Igorotak shirts are popular among Igorot communities abroad.

In a blog post dated 7 July 2009, Kamulo wrote:

My cousin, a store manager of her older sister's NADUMA shop in SM Baguio, was searching the Internet for IGOROTAK shirts when she came across my blog post from August of last year when we attended an Igorot party here in Chicago and saw many fellow Igorots wearing the shirts. She felt bad that we didn't have our own so she sent 10 shirts through the mail—two for each of us. These shirts are just way cool! We immediately wore it to a party and had a friend begging to have one of them. My wife replied in jest—"Bakit, Igorot ka ba?" (Why, are you an Igorot?) It was just a testament of the shirts' uber-coolness. I wore my IGOROTAK shirt proudly to work during casual Friday and it was a conversation starter. I was asked multiple times what it meant, and of course, I willingly explained.

As Kamulo's post suggests, the shirt is designed to attract attention. The word "IGOROTAK" boldly printed on the shirt, is clearly meant to invite questions or trigger curiosity among friends, colleagues, and passing strangers. The explanation on the back is designed precisely to satisfy that curiosity: to provide a 'dictionary'

explanation of what the word means, including its pronunciation, origin ("bibakese," from BIBAK), and definition in the English language ("statement asserting one's ethnic origin, as in, **I am an Igorot!**"). The statement is likewise printed using a font that is large and legible enough for any passing stranger to be able to read it (see Figures 1 and 2). Crediting BIBAK for the 'origin' of the word "Igorotak" is an explicit reference to what Cabalda-Ticad (2016) has already revealed: that the shirt was originally produced for the Igorot community abroad.

Situating the Igorotak t-shirt's provenance in the desire of the diasporic community to resignify themselves as Igorot, based on their "ethnic origin," for their global (or non-local) audiences may be understood in terms of cultural identity as a *positioning* (Hall 1990): "cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture" (226). This positioning emphasizes shared or similar histories (among Igorots), and simultaneously highlights their cultural differences (e.g. from a general 'other,' including other minorities, other Filipinos). However, while shared cultural and history and 'common origins' may constitute strong bonds, it is only, Hall (1996a) argues, imagined, metaphorical: it is a self-determined position from which they (Igorots in the diaspora, initially) can identify themselves as Igorot and from which they can "fashion, stylize, produce and 'perform'" their own versions of Igorotness (14).

In interpreting the Igorotak t-shirt's active significations, it is also important to note the process behind its production. As Arjun Appadurai (1997) states, the social and technological forces responsible for the production of a tangible commodity cannot and should not be ignored, especially in efforts to understand its social functions and meanings: "it is only by analyzing these that we can interpret human transactions and calculations that enliven things" (77).

In the past, production tools and machines for printed t-shirts and similar garments were in the exclusive hands of those in possession of the considerable capital needed to acquire them (Crane 2000). But small-scale production of t-shirts became possible with the invention of silkscreen printing. This technique allowed virtually anybody with access to a pint of paint and a silk screen, which was and still is available at a reasonable cost, to impress onto any piece of cloth a previously-set design. Today, with increased availability (legal or otherwise) of mechanical drawing and layout computer software like Photoshop, people can easily transpose computer-set designs to silk screen templates. For instance, street shops are now able to offer their t-shirt printing and designing services for a minimal cost (as low as US\$0.50 to 1.00 per shirt for monochromatic

designs), provided that the shirts are bought in advance. All one has to do is take a design or a concept to the shop for them to turn it into a silkscreen template, which they can then imprint on as many t-shirts as one requires.

The Igorotak t-shirt, with its plain textual design, benefited from these technological advancements. The t-shirts, which sell for around 200 to 500 Philippine pesos, enable Igorot identity to be expressed through clothing, something that only the *tapis* or the *bahag* could do in the past. Owing to innovations in printing design and clothing technology, it has become possible to create the t-shirts, which are far more practical and socially acceptable to wear in public than a loincloth or an elaborate skirt, less expensively than ever before and, therefore, to allow for these to be used as cultural markers of ethnic identity. Moreover, it is now also possible to create a market or demand for it by means of the internet and other translocal social networks; and, indeed, the t-shirt has been mainly marketed online, either through online shops/agents or marketing messages that target the Igorot diasporic community.

Use, Value, and Meaning

The average age of informants was 26, with the youngest being 18 years old and the oldest being 38 years old, at the time the interviews were conducted. All informants identify themselves as Igorot and own at least one Igorotak t-shirt; five informants owned more than one t-shirt. Sixteen informants are based in the Cordillera region, with 14 of them being college students and two stay-at-home parents. Sixteen are employed: 10 are based in Metro Manila and six are based abroad, either in Dubai or in North America (US and Canada).

Informants were asked questions, individually and in group discussions, related to the use, value, and meaning of the t-shirt for them as self-identifying Igorots. Questions around their cultural identity—what it means and why the need to assert it in the present—arose, after initial discussions on the acts of meaning-making that the t-shirt precipitated among respondents.

All informants saw the t-shirt as a symbol of pride, specifically pride in their ethnicity. All of them wear the shirts at least once a month (at most, once a week) to “show” their ethnicity to other people, which could be fellow Igorots, especially those who “are not ashamed of their ancestry,” or to non-Igorot ‘others’ (e.g. tourists, foreigners). For them, the t-shirt also functioned as a convenient way to inform others of one’s cultural identity without having to utter a single word.

I got the t-shirt for myself and I proudly wear it at least once every two weeks. It's a statement shirt and I love wearing it especially when I'm somewhere outside the Cordillera because it describes who I am to others even if they don't talk to me, although, even if I'm in the Cordillera, I still feel proud when I wear it. (Lara, female, 27, based in the US)

The t-shirt makes me extremely proud because when I wear it, especially abroad, people can know that I come from somewhere, some group that they are not part of. But I don't even bring it with me when I go to the Philippines or home to the *ili* because I don't see the point. (Rose, female, 28, based in Dubai)

I wear the shirt only on occasions where there are tourists or whenever I go out of town. I am proud of the fact that I am an Igorot, so as a statement I label myself and let the people I meet know it too. I am amused at the reactions of ignorant people. (Don, male, 23, based in Manila)

In terms of the t-shirt's use, informants debated during the group discussions whether only 'real' Igorots possess the privilege to don it. Twenty-six of them believed only self-identifying Igorots, who are recognized as Igorots by the community, are entitled to do so. One informant, Mei (female, 27, based in Dubai), said she would give the t-shirt to someone who "wishes he was Igorot." Another shared:

It would be weird for a non-Igorot to wear the t-shirt, because it's about being proud of who you are, being proud that you're an Igorot—to display your pride even when there are still ignorant assumptions being made about us, like we have tails, don't speak English or walk around wearing g-strings. (Russell, male, 23, based in Baguio City)

Yet the value and use of the Igorotak t-shirt remained anchored in its actuality as apparel: people wanted it in colors they liked, with one, Carla (female, 18, based in Baguio City), refusing to wear what was given to her as a gift because she did not like its color and design; Ed (male, 19, based in Manila) wore his for the first time after he realized how it made him look "cool." Similarly, the use and function of the shirt could be significantly qualified by certain concerns: Rose (female, 38, based in Dubai) admitted that, with her weight gain, she no longer wears what she has; Larry (male, 28, based in Canada) has ordered an extra shirt because he wanted to wear one more than once or twice a month. Ultimately, the informants always returned to the matter of pride in wearing the t-shirt.

At the end of the day, it's just a shirt, yes—it shrinks, it fades, we can outgrow it. But it's a shirt you wear to make a statement—it's not an ordinary, everyday shirt. It makes me feel different when I wear it. I'm convinced that it is because of the pride I feel when I wear it, it's like screaming to the world 'I'm proud to be an Igorot!' (Kate, female, 27, based in Manila)

For informants, the t-shirt's meaning may be related to the need for Igorot people today, especially those who have moved out of the *ili* (home village/town) or who were raised in urban areas, away from their parents' *ili*, to identify themselves as belonging to one place, one tribe, one group or one people. Among 32 informants, only three of them were born and spent most of their childhood in the *ili*; the rest were born abroad or in urban centers like Baguio and Metro Manila. Those born and raised outside the *ili* expressed how the t-shirt helped them “connect to their roots:”

For me, the t-shirt is a reminder that I came from somewhere and that I am part of a bigger tribe—to connect to my roots. Even though I am a minority and have been discriminated against because of my ethnicity in school when I was a child growing up in Manila, I feel like now is the perfect time for me to stand up for myself and show that I am proud to be Igorot. (Jim, male, 28, based in Manila)

All my life in the US, I've felt like I didn't belong. Once I've learned about my history and culture, I felt like, yeah, this is who I am—I am an Igorot. And I want people to know that. (Paul, male, 29, based in the US)

Articulations of Igorotness

During group discussions, informants conversed at length about why they felt the Igorotak t-shirt is important today for people like them—mostly young, urban, middle class Igorots. Initial answers touched on 'statement t-shirts' being very “trendy,” and indicatively moved away from “politics:”

It is way cooler to be different, unique, ethnic, indigenous, a minority now—if you are part of the minority, it's a privilege. Everything's about identity with social media anyway. If you actually have a unique identity, a cultural identity, you're in. (Amie, female, 21, based in Baguio City)

Everyone wants to be indigenous these days because it's cool. Remember the campaign on the *Lumads* [indigenous peoples in Mindanao]? Everybody was on to that, but only to the extent that it was hip, I think. They didn't really care about the politics

behind it—the mining, the political killings, the displacement. Same way with the “Igorotak” thing, it’s hip because it’s away from politics. Is this good or bad? I don’t know. (Mitch, female, 29, based in Baguio City)

I think it helps that it’s a normal shirt—we can wear it every day, without fuss. Yes, people think it’s cool to be indigenous these days. This is in contrast to when I was younger and we felt like we had to hide the fact that we were Igorot. It’s a good thing, for sure. And it helps that it’s just a “neutral” statement. It’s just a declaration that I am an Igorot, nothing more or less, no politics. (Jones, male, 29, based in Manila)

The “campaign on Lumads” is a reference to the #StopLumadKillings campaign against the militarization of indigenous communities in Mindanao, southern Philippines (collectively referred to as Lumad); military operations against resisters had resulted in the deaths of three indigenous leaders and the displacement of at least 3,000 Lumads in Mindanao (Tupaz 2015). Statements from the Philippine National Commission on Culture and the Arts (NCCA 2015), among other organizations, and United Nations rapporteurs, have condemned the “paramilitary assault and killings” and called for justice on behalf of the indigenous leaders who were killed.

By invoking the perceived neutrality of “Igorotak” as a statement, informants hint at a sense of discomfort about associating themselves and the t-shirt with the politics that has historically impelled assertions of Igorot identity. This harks back to Kaigorotan, which was earlier analyzed as a collective resistance identity, following Castells’ typology (2004). Igorot peoples have organized under the banner of Kaigorotan then to oppose development projects which they believed threatened their way of life, and also to engage in the collective struggle for their right to self-determination—a fight that continues to date despite the existence of protective laws like the 1997 Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (Republic Act No. 8371).

Hall (1990) and Castells (2004) would argue that any form of identification constitutes, one way or the other, a political exercise or act. Asserting one’s identity is inexorably political because it concerns the power to represent or label oneself, versus one’s representations and labelling by others, including the state and the dominant media. But the responses from informants suggest that, while they may recognize the political undertones of identity making, they may not necessarily be interested in engaging in the “politics” entailed by their otherwise largely symbolic assertions of Igorot identity.

“Igorotak” as a Post-Resistance Identity

Based on the responses gathered from producers and consumers of the Igorotak t-shirt, the piece of clothing may be considered a significant marker in the history of Igorotness. From a term invented, reinforced, and circulated by dominant institutions dating back to the colonial era, “Igorot” has since been embraced by those labeled as Igorots themselves in their attempt to forge a united stand against perceived threats to their existence and rights as communities. With the local creation and global circulation of the t-shirt, we have a situation of self-identifying Igorots, within the Cordillera and elsewhere, proudly declaring their ethnicity (or “ethnic origin”) through a vestment that straightforwardly labels them as Igorot (“Igorotak”).

In this course of events, Igorotness shows an evolution from a collective name imposed for the purposes of domination (legitimizing identity) and an identifying banner against modern forms of state hegemony (resistance identity) to a personal avowal of identity expressed in the ordinary act of “wearing” it through the Igorotak shirt. Based on Castells typology, however, “Igorotak” cannot be sufficiently categorized as a transformative project identity. No sufficient evidence exists for the interpretation that users of the t-shirt are actively looking to redefine Igorotness or to transform social structures responsible for the continuing marginalization of Cordillera peoples.

To reiterate, self-identifying Igorots interviewed for this study are proud to wear the t-shirt as a sign of their cultural identity, their Igorotness, which locates them as belonging to one group, one shared history, one common origin. But they are also proud to wear it as a marker of their difference from others (non-minorities, non-indigenous peoples, non-Igorot others). Still, it must be acknowledged that there is hesitance, on their part, to consider their acts or articulations of self-identity as an explicitly political exercise.

This uneasiness in avowing the “politics” behind assertions of Igorot identity is a position that may be explained, if partially, by Hall’s concept of the post-modern subject (1996b). Informants, who are mostly young, urban, and middle class, and most of whom came to maturity outside their hometowns/villages (or “ethnic origins”), admitted that a performative notion of difference informs their identificatory acts of wearing the shirt. Instead of their difference from a majority culture being a source of anxiety as it was in the past for many Igorots, being able to identify with something that is “other,” marginal, or not mainstream is now “trendy,” “cool,” and “hip” for them and their peers. But they also show some awareness

that this trend could change and so too could their own identification with, and definitions of, Igorotness. As two informants declared:

The question is: will this still be cool five, ten years from now? Will we still care to "assert our identity" then? Who knows? But I think for now, we are in this moment when it is exactly what people like us need or want. It may be a starting point for something bigger, maybe, bigger than just a t-shirt. I don't know [what] that would look like and maybe I don't really care. [laughs] (Gina, female, 26, based in Baguio City)

I hope it's not a trend. I want more young people especially to be openly proud that they are Igorot, be proud of their ancestors, where they came from, their culture. But I also don't know what else it could become, you know? Will it always just be about pride? Maybe we need to move beyond just pride and talk about the issues confronting the Igorot community, especially the young people, today, like maybe climate change, eco-tourism, environmental protection, sustainable development. And also migration—so many people are moving out! I don't know. It seems shallow if it's always about just pride in being an Igorot. (Gerald, male, 29, based in Manila)

In this situation, Igorot identity, as expressed and asserted through the "Igorotak" t-shirt, may be positioned as one that aims to move beyond the collective Igorot resistance identity, beyond resisting actual and perceived forms of oppression. As a gesture, it remains uncertain about what of the modern and post-modern spatial and temporal changes in the Igorot community it might seek to address or engage. For preliminary purposes of exposition, Igorotness at play or being put to work in this phenomenon may be classified as a *post-resistance identity*.

This study recognizes that Igorotness, as expressed or performed today, through the t-shirt and related means, is significantly determined by the increasing emigration of Igorots from the Cordillera provinces to urban centers like Baguio or Metro Manila, and abroad. At the very least, this development could key us to noticeable changes in the social and cultural relations within Igorot communities. As McKay notes, the creation of new local, global, and "translocal" Igorot identities is inexorably linked to modern migration patterns, which have fostered so-called virtual villages to take the place of the actual *ili* or locales (2006, 293). Owing to unlimited and democratizing access to the internet and social networking websites like Facebook, Igorots from all over the archipelago and the world are now able to connect and commune online, on the basis of their common cultural identity, in ways that

would have been less possible when people remained and were rooted in their actual *ili* or hometowns/villages.

The Facebook page called “Igorotak” is one such virtual *ili*. A review of the typical postings on this page reveals recurrent declarations by those who are active participants that they are Igorot (or Full-Blooded Igorot/FBI) and are proud to be so, often identifying for readers what part of the Cordillera they or their parents hail from. While it is not clear how many members are based abroad, the posts appear to be mostly from people who have moved out of their hometowns, declaring to their *kailian* (village mates) how homesick they are and how much they long to be “home.”

Hall (1996b) has earlier acknowledged this “fascination with difference and the marketing of ethnicity and ‘otherness’” (623) as a consequence of globalization, defined as the processes of “integrating and connecting communities and organizations in new space-time combinations” (619). Particular developments and changes in social structures and relations in line with the unprecedented Igorot diaspora-formation, the ‘trend’ of identifying with difference, and the increase in access to clothing and information and communications technologies, have all allowed something like the “Igorotak” t-shirt to mark and signify this latest phase in the continuing evolution of Igorotness.

Conclusion

In today’s globalized order, local, cultural, and community identities have become more unstable even as they have become more significant than ever. Paradoxically, instead of becoming more global in their forms of identification, people and groups are turning more and more to the local, to the particular, to the margins from which they have been severed by migratory displacements (Hall 1996a; 1997). As manifested by this study’s findings, particular historical ‘moments’ have allowed the “Igorotak” t-shirt to become a symbol of post-resistance Igorotness—one that consolidates and identifies Igorot peoples in a manner that the *bahag* or *tapis* (indigenous Igorot clothings) did in the past, and one that seeks to move beyond resisting actual and perceived forms of oppression toward the potential articulations of the post-modern aspirations of diasporic Igorot communities.

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