

**Southeast Asian
Ecocriticism**
Theories, Practices, Prospects

Edited by John Charles Ryan

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Chapter Four

Imaging Indigenous Relationships with Nature

The Case of Igorot Music Videos

Jason Paolo R. Telles

In the array of discourses regarding the conservation, protection, and management of the environment, the perspectives of indigenous groups have usually been neglected or “othered” by scientists and policy makers.¹ This is evident in the relative historical lack of traditional and indigenous perspectives in environmental discourse in Southeast Asia. It is only in the last two decades, in particular, that Southeast Asian indigenous practices have been increasingly acknowledged in a limited range of studies. For example, in 2000, Roy Ellen, Peter Parkes, and Alan Bicker published a collection of essays, *Indigenous Environmental Knowledge and Its Transformations: Critical Anthropological Perspectives*.² Chapters from the volume examine the application and appropriation of indigenous knowledge, for instance, in Indonesia³ and Northeastern Luzon in the Philippines.⁴ Also, John Grim’s 2001 book, *Indigenous Traditions and Ecology: The Interbeing of Cosmology and Community*,⁵ contains works on indigenous practices and perspectives, including chapters on Borneo,⁶ Sarawak, East Malaysia,⁷ and the northern Philippines.⁸ Roy Ellen also provides a preliminary selection of research on Southeast Asian ecological perspectives in *Modern Crises and Traditional Strategies: Local Ecological Knowledge in Island Southeast Asia*, published initially in 2007.⁹ Moreover, the book, *Environmental and Climate Change in South and Southeast Asia: How are Local Cultures Coping?* (2014), presents a compilation of discussions on the adaptation techniques of local cultures in South and Southeast Asian regions.¹⁰ In the Philippines, the Cordillera Studies Center at the University of the Philippines Baguio and the Tebtebba Foundation have published studies of the environmental conservation, management, and practices of indigenous people in the Philippine Cordillera region and in other parts of the world.¹¹ Furthermore, Leni Camacho, Marilyn Combalicer, and



their colleagues examined the forest conservation approaches and technologies of the indigenous residents of the Philippine Cordillera region,¹² while Chona Camille Vince Cruz and Ryanorlie Abeledo looked into the traditional environmental practices of Eva Aetas in Orion, Bataan, in the Philippines.¹³

Despite the gradual acknowledgment of Southeast Asian indigenous perspectives in the academic community, these published works remain relatively small in number. This marginalization, evident in the relative scarcity of literature on the subject, is in line with one of the key features of protectionist arguments found in various environmental writings. According to Peter Wilshusen and his colleagues, protectionism mythologizes the existence of “harmonious, ecologically friendly local communities.”¹⁴ Included in this argument are the assumptions that traditional peoples lack the ability to achieve the aims of environmental conservation and likewise that the motivations and practices of rural communities are flawed, that is, not scientifically adequate.¹⁵ Another reason for this rejection or neglect is the assumption that scientific knowledge is superior in its presumed display of objectivity and generalizability. In contrast, indigenous knowledge is held largely as subjective or culturally dependent.¹⁶ This does not mean, however, that all Western-trained scientists exhibit biases against traditional knowledge. Indeed, as the above-mentioned studies indicate, there have been preliminary efforts to include indigenous standpoints in environmental discourse.

In the Philippines, the othering of indigenous people and their perspectives is also a product of the country’s colonial past.¹⁷ The origin of this treatment of indigenous people in the Philippines can be traced back to the Spanish colonial period when the native population was divided into two groups—the majority, consisting of lowlanders who were Hispanicized and Christianized, and the minority, including Muslims and “pagan mountain dwellers,” who resisted Spanish control. This resulted from the *reduccion* policy with the goal of controlling the Filipino people, rendering them submissive to Spanish colonial rule and, ultimately, forcing them to adopt Hispanic culture. Those who refused to abide by the rule and went to settlements in the mountains or hills were dubbed *cimarrones*, *ladrones*, *remontados*, *tulisanes*, or *monteses* by the Spaniards.¹⁸ During the American colonization of the Philippines, the othering of indigenous people was evident through various policies, such as the principle of benevolent assimilation. Its implementation differed between Christians and members of non-Christian tribes. The rationale for the distinction based on religious faith and for the differing implementations of the policy, according to a circular released by the governmental Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes, was due to the “degree of civilization” of non-Christians, which is “low grade.”¹⁹

Even in recent years, images of indigenous people in the Philippine mainstream media are still patterned according to this colonial frame. For instance,



recent environmental documentaries produced in the country such as *Signos: Banta ng Nagbabagang Klima (Signs: Threats of a Changing Climate)* (2008), *Planet Philippines* (2009), *Wildlife for Sale* (2010), and *Oras Na (It is Time)* (2011) have constructed indigenous people according to the colonialist and imperialist tropes of animalization, infantilization, and poverty.²⁰ For instance, *Signos* reinforces the infantilization of Philippine indigenous groups in its portrayal of the Badjaos of Zamboanga and Dumagats of Quezon Province as people who lack scientific credibility. In the documentary, they are shown as mere victims while scientists from urban centers define environmental concerns and propose solutions.²¹ These environmental documentaries, moreover, depict indigenous people as accessories to the destruction and depletion of natural resources. In *Wildlife for Sale*, the Palawan tribe is a cause of the decline of the Philippine hill mynas (a bird of the starling family) because the group is considered driven by the will to profit and escape poverty, hunger, and the lack of other basic necessities.²²

In the Philippines, indigenous people are rarely regarded as valuable contributors to defining environmental issues, concerns, risks, and possible solutions.²³ This othering is problematic due to its tendency of ignoring “key aspects of social and political processes that shape how conservation interventions happen in specific contexts.”²⁴ In other words, such a standpoint neglects the sociocultural characteristics and features of indigenous communities that are of vital importance to the conceptualization and production of effective and context-appropriate environmental activities. June Prill-Brett posits that the traditional knowledge of indigenous people should be reconciled with scientific perspectives to devise policies that are more socially just and appropriate. She argues that indigenous knowledge could “foster a better understanding of development and provide an innovative methodological incentive in the search for cost-effective and sustainable survival strategies for poor and marginalized communities.”²⁵ The inclusion and recognition of such perspectives could result in alternative frameworks for environmental planning and policy making. One way to discover these perspectives, apart from anthropological methodologies, is to conduct ecocritical analyses of cultural products and practices such as music, visual art, and the oral and written stories of indigenous people. These cultural forms are important because they originate in and reflect indigenous worldviews (see also Ignasi Ribó’s proposal in chapter 2 for an environmental hermeneutics recognizing the voices of indigenous people in Thailand).²⁶

Contemporary indigenous people adopt mainstream methods, including filmmaking, as part of their cultural practices. Jennifer Machiorlatti contends that film or video-making is a “cinematic extension of the oral tradition” of the Native Americans of the United States and the First Nations of Canada.²⁷ Similarly, this chapter posits that music video production, especially of local



songs, has now become an extension of cultural expression for indigenous groups from the Philippine Cordillera region, who are collectively called the Igorots. The term *Igorot*, originating from an old Tagalog term *igolot* for “mountain people,”²⁸ is used in a contemporary context to refer collectively to indigenous ethnolinguistic groups such as the Kankana-ey, Ibaloi, Kalinga, Bontoc, and Kalanguya people residing within the six provinces of the Cordillera Administrative Region of the Philippines, including Abra, Apayao, Benguet, Ifugao, Kalinga provinces, and Mountain Province. Each group has a distinct set of beliefs, practices, and languages. Some groups, however, have expressed their disapproval over being associated with the name due to the negative connotations and stereotypes that are imperial in origin. Accordingly, some have preferred to be called Cordilleran.²⁹ Despite this debate, scholars have used “Igorot” to refer to indigenous groups in the region in order to attach a positive meaning to the colonial term. The Igorot groups mainly reside in the Cordillera mountain range, also known as the Gran Cordillera Central. Located in the north central portion of Luzon, the region contains forest-covered mountains—many of which reach more than two thousand meters, or six thousand feet, in height—as well as several major hills, river systems, and valleys.³⁰ The various types of habitat in its six provinces include pine and montane forests, rich deposits of gold, copper, and other minerals, and abundant water and soil sources that make the area suitable for highland agriculture.³¹

Igorot music video production, nonetheless, is not entirely an indigenous form but has been appropriated from the West. In its postcolonial sense, appropriation refers to “the ways in which post-colonial societies take over those aspects of imperial culture” to represent, articulate, or express their own identities and worldviews.³² One of the aspects appropriated and indigenized by the Igorots is the Western country and folk music genre, originally brought by American educators in the 1930s to the province of Benguet and the city of Baguio. As a former hill station of the American colonists, the province and the city hold remnants of their past—from the names of their streets, small administrative divisions called *barangays*, buildings, and parks, to the people’s choice of clothing and hobbies, and, even, in their local pop culture and mass media. Among these American influences, the country or cowboy lifestyle is one of those evident today. In fact, locals who are mostly indigenous Ibalois or Kankana-eyes coined the word *kinnoboyan* “to refer to a contemporary experience, that is, to behave like a cowboy.”³³ This Western style has pervaded the consciousness of the Ibalois and the Kankana-eyes, especially those from older generations, as seen in their attire, transportation (especially the use of horses), livelihood, and leisure, and through the popularity of both foreign and local country music.

Western country music entered the Cordillera region during the American colonial period in the early years of the twentieth century. In an effort to Americanize and facilitate the colonization of the region, the American brand of education was introduced. During that time, educators assigned to schools in the Cordillera region taught Western songs, mostly within the country or folk genre, to their students. This resulted in the rise of the popularity of such music, even after the Second World War.³⁴ Early forms of the indigenized version of country and folk music eventually sprouted through the “total disregard of copyright in the use of tunes, translated or adapted lyrics, and even recorded accompaniments.”³⁵ For example, the melodies of Western folk songs were used by the local youth as accompaniments for their courtship chants or *day-eng*.³⁶

One of the original appropriators of country music for the local scene is Timothy Chaokas, a former vice governor of Mountain Province and an educator in the 1960s. He borrowed the melody of the Protestant gospel hymn “Love at Home or When There’s Love at Home” composed by John Hugh McNaughton in 1854. The song was introduced to their area by American teachers and missionaries.³⁷ Chaokas wrote his own lyrics in the Kankana-ey language, giving way to the birth of “Nan Layad Nan Likatan” (“The Love We Have Suffered For”) in the 1960s. Pedro Chimalpan, a Dangwa Tranco bus driver from Bontoc, Mountain Province, eventually picked the song up for recording. It was then purchased by George Tate, a former representative of the old Mountain Province in the Philippine Congress. After it was commercially released, it became popular in the Kankana-ey and Bontoc communities of the Mountain Province. In 1989, even Lourdes Fangki, dubbed the Cordillera songbird, recorded her own version of the song.³⁸ Several other local country music artists from the Benguet province eventually composed and recorded their own songs. Some of these artists were Rod Danggol, Morr Tadeo, Conrado Dalis, Cole Mendoza, and Genar Pacheco. Due to its growing popularity, the genre invaded radio broadcasting, especially in the local stations RPN-DZBS, DZWT 540 Radyo Totoo, 99.9 Country DZWR, and DZWX Bombo Radyo.³⁹

Today, local country music artists and producers have also ventured into the production of music videos. The beginning of the Igorot film and music video industry is usually attributed to the efforts in the early 2000s of the local evangelical Christian group Vernacular Video Ministry led by Lutheran lay minister Sammy “Samiklad” Dangpa from Buguias, Benguet, as well as Rosendo “Sendong” Salvacio.⁴⁰ All CDs, VCDs, and DVDs of local country singers are available in Baguio and Benguet music stores, and, to be sure, some are located at the Shoppers’ Lane near the University of Baguio. The artists and producers, themselves, go from house to house to sell their records.

Due to their popularity, they have also become victims of piracy. Bootleg copies are sold by vendors of pirated CDs and DVDs located in the Baguio Public Market, the Maharlika Livelihood Center, in Session Road, and in other corners of Baguio city.⁴¹

Music videos of local country music in Baguio and Benguet are forms of what Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino call the “Third Cinema.” In 1969, they proposed an alternative form of cinema that aims to veer away from the conventions of Hollywood films as a response to colonial and neocolonial images of non-Western cultures and individuals. According to them, Third Cinema is a tool wherein the “social layers considered backward” would be empowered 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.”⁴² Borrowing Getino and Solanas’s idea, I contend that Igorot music videos are fulfillments of their concept of Third Cinema. The videos articulate the self-representations of Igorot culture, identities, and worldviews.

INDIGENOUS STUDIES, POSTCOLONIAL ECOCRITICISM, AND IGOROT COUNTRY MUSIC VIDEOS

The Third Cinema is evident in the Igorots’ environmental songs and music videos because they give us a view of their “cosmovisions” or “conceptions of entangled human relations with more-than-human worlds.”⁴³ As such, these are rich resources reflecting their traditional and contemporary perspectives on the environment. Adamson and Monani posit the importance of such “cosmovisions,” introduced and analyzed in most chapters of their book, *Ecocriticism and Indigenous Studies: Conversations from Earth to Cosmos*, in facilitating the acknowledgment and acceptance of “more ethical considerations of wider worlds necessary for planetary survival.”⁴⁴ In conjunction with the concept of cosmovisions, I employ the framework of postcolonial ecocriticism of indigenous cultures. According to Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, this type of ecocritical analysis has two objectives: (1) to critique or contest Western perspectives and (2) to present and discuss possible alternative ideologies on environmental development and management (see also chapters 2 and 3).⁴⁵ My argument addresses the second aim by presenting and discussing Igorot perspectives on the natural environment as evident in their music videos. I do this by examining how the lyrics and mise-en-scene of four local country music videos—“Kalutaan” (“Land/Earth”), “Kaigorotan” (“Igorot/Cordillera Region”), “Kabanbantayan” (“Mountains”), and “Karayan Amburayan” (“Amburayan River”)—frame and represent the Igorots’ relationship with their environment.



“KALUTAAN” (2011)

In 2011, Highlander Videoworks, led by Leticia Aviles and Belina Lim, produced the music video for the song “Kalutaan” as part of an album with the same title. The song was composed by Constancia Tumpap Bilayon and performed as a duet by the singers Bitit and Bingbing. The song entreats listeners to conserve land, rivers, and nonhuman life. The full original lyrics of the song and its English translation are below:

<i>Kalutaan kataguan</i>	The land/earth that is the source of life
<i>Entako ayowanan</i>	Let us take care of it
<i>Adi tako palaluan</i>	Let us not abuse it
<i>Ta aben omayowan</i>	So it would take care of us in return

<i>Din natalunton ay dontog</i>	Those numerous mountains
<i>Bay-am ta matoto-od</i>	Let them remain standing
<i>Bareng ya tomatakdeg</i>	May they forever stand
<i>Adi koman mayegyegyeg</i>	And never crumble

<i>Ginawang ay madipdipos</i>	The rivers that run deep
<i>Bay-am ta man-ay-ayos</i>	Let them flow
<i>Bareng adi maab-abos</i>	May they never run dry
<i>Adi koma omap-apos</i>	And never hold a grudge

<i>Din man-it-it-it ay titit</i>	May the chirping birds
<i>Bay-an koman di palsiit</i>	Be spared by those with slingshots
<i>Ta man-ay-ayam ed langit</i>	May they fly up in the sky
<i>Uray manken-it di sigit</i>	Even under the burning heat
<i>Et no way ena dumatngan</i>	Should there come a time
<i>Ay mantabon din buwan</i>	That the moon would hide
<i>Din sey-ang maliboo-an</i>	The sun be covered by clouds
<i>Din talaw masalanan</i>	The stars shrouded

<i>Kalutaan ay kawad-an</i>	The earth we live in
<i>adi iman nanbanogan</i>	Is something we did not work for
<i>Amin ay pan-iyasyasan</i>	All of its bounties
<i>adi iman siyat bayadan</i>	We do not need to pay for
<i>Di mantete-e na-oney</i>	We who live here are blessed
<i>Asi dan wat nilalaso</i>	But take this for granted

<i>Amin met et naipepeey</i>	Everything is abundant
<i>Adi dan siyat makimamatey</i>	We do not have to fight
<i>Tan mo din lobong et mabbay</i>	And if the world grows tired





*Ya am-i-am-in et magday
Into di ammeyam pay
Tan din lobong et eng-enggay*

And everything falls apart
Where would you flee
There is only one world

*Kalutaan kataguan,
Entako ayowanan
Adi tako palaluan,
Ta aben omayowan*

The land that is the source of life
Let us take care of it
Let us not abuse it
So it would take care of us in return⁴⁶

“KAIGOROTAN” (2012)

Released in 2012, “Kaigorotan” was composed, performed, and produced by Greg Daganos. The song addresses the Cordillera region, its natural environment, and its role in the daily lives of Igorot people. Additionally, the song also calls for the protection of the region:

*Isnan rehiyon di Kaigorotan
Ad-adoy bendisyon en Kabunyan*

In the Cordillera region
Are the many blessings given by
Kabunyan

*Say entako panyamyamanan
Tan say entako pay nataguan*

We are grateful
For these have been our sources of life

*Dontog taraken ya san ginawang
Ya din udom ay kinabaknang
Garden, talon ya minas an
Danay di entako nabiyagan*

Mountains, livestock, and the rivers
And the other sources of wealth
Gardens, fields and mines
They have given us livelihood

*Kaigorotan entako ayowanan,
Sinay di entako napuan
Kaigorotan adi tako baybay-an
Sinay di entako naiyanakan*

Let us take care of *Kaigorotan*
This is where our race comes from
Let us not abandon *Kaigorotan*
This is where we were born

*Entako et man-es-esa
Entako et mankadwa
Uray entoy nagapuam ay ili,
Uray sinoy nabangunam ay kali
Mountain Province, ya Kalinga,
Ya udom ay partin di Abra
Baguio, Benguet ya Apayao
Adi linglingan probinsyan di Ifugao*

Let us unite
Let us be comrades
Whichever village you come from
Whichever language you speak
Mountain Province and Kalinga
And other parts of Abra
Baguio, Benguet, and Apayao
Let us not forget the province of Ifugao





<i>Kaigorotan entako aywanan</i>	Let us take care of <i>Kaigorotan</i> ,
<i>Sinay di entako napuan</i>	This is where our race comes from
<i>Kaigorotan adi tako baybay-an</i>	Let us not abandon <i>Kaigorotan</i> ,
<i>Sinay di entako naiyanakan</i>	This is where we were born ⁴⁷

“KARAYAN AMBURAYAN” (2013)

Johnell, Abegail, Reyzalyn, and Bertson of the musical group Highway Stars released the song “Karayan Amburayan” in 2013. Unlike the previous songs, “Karayan Amburayan” does not focus on the environment, in general, but rather centers on the Amburayan River, which originates in the Cordillera mountains and flows across the provinces of Benguet, Ilocos Sur, and La Union. Some of the song’s verses briefly allude to another river called Balili that crosses Baguio City and the municipalities of La Trinidad and Sablan:

<i>Karayan di Amburayan</i>	Amburayan River
<i>Mayat si panlangoyan</i>	A nice place for swimming
<i>Mayat si am-ameyan,</i>	A nice place to visit
<i>Ay en panpiknikan</i>	For picnics
<i>No amey ta’d Amburayan</i>	If we visit Amburayan
<i>Ad-ado san panluganan</i>	There are a lot of rides to choose from
<i>Wada san Dakiwagan</i>	There is the Dakiwagan bus
<i>Ya lugan di kakailian</i>	And vehicles of our village mates
<i>Ay kayo et! Umali kayo tako’n man- pasyar</i>	Come, join us and let’s visit
<i>Manrelax sagpaminsan</i>	Relax once in a while
<i>Manbaon si pinikpikan</i>	Bring some <i>pinikpikan</i>
<i>Sia’y tako’n pansasangoan</i>	For us to share
<i>Ay kayo et! Umali kayo tako’n man- pasyar</i>	Come, join us and let’s visit
<i>Man-relax sagpaminsan</i>	Relax once in a while
<i>Manbaon si pinikpikan</i>	Bring some <i>pinikpikan</i>
<i>Sia’y tako’n pansasango-an</i>	For us to share
<i>Hoy hoy hoy! Hoy hoy hoy!</i>	Hey hey hey! Hey hey hey!
<i>Baken en panpitlawan</i>	This is not a wallowing pool
<i>San papastol yo ay nuwang</i>	For your <i>carabaos</i>
<i>Ya da san bebesa-ang</i>	And your pigs





*Hoy hoy hoy! Hoy hoy hoy!
Baken en panpitlawan
San papastol yo ay nuwang
Ya da san bebesa-ang*

Hey hey hey! Hey hey hey!
This is not a wallowing pool
For your *carabaos*
And your pigs

*Karayan ed kad-an yo
Mayat ngata'y pan-amesan
Adi tako met ammo
Nan-ames ed na ondo*

The rivers in your hometown
They are good spots for bathing
We really would not know
Someone might have bathed upstream

*Karayan di Balili
Ay sino'y kanan yo's di
Maga ngata'y namnama
Maiwasan san basura*

The Balili River
What do you think of it?
Is there any hope
In keeping it free of garbage

*Ay ammo yo ay manlangoy
Ikaykay yo san takkay yo
Isikyad yo san siwal yo
In-inot maadal yo*

Do you know how to swim
Let your arms stroke
Let your legs kick
Soon you will learn how it's done

*Ay ammo yo ay manlangoy
Ikaykay yo san takkay yo
Isikyad yo san siwal yo
In-inot maadal yo*

Do you know how to swim?
Let your arms stroke
Let your legs kick
Soon you will learn how it's done⁴⁸

“KABANBATAYAN” (2009)

In 2009, Marcons Dayaoen of Abatan Records produced and released a music video of “Kabanbantayan,” composed and performed by local music artist Peter Tanan. Similar to Greg Daganos’s “Kaigorotan,” the song also celebrates the Cordillera region and, in particular, its mountainous landscape. Tanan’s lyrics, however, do not feature a call for preservation but rather remind listeners of the benefits of mountain environments to their lives:

*Ili mis kabanbantayan
Ili ay Kaigorotan
Siya san nalpuwan, enkami nang-
kapuwan
Adi lallay adi lallay, Adi lalallay*

Our homeland in the mountains
Our homeland Kaigorotan
From here has risen, our race
Adi lallay adi lallay, Adi lalallay





*Ginawang mi ay kalinisan
Mayat si mamingbingwitan
Siya san natagoan,
Alapo mid nat-awan
Adi lallay adi lallay, Adi lalallay*

Our rivers which are the cleanest
They are good fishing grounds
It has been a source of life
Of our ancestors
Adi lallay adi lallay, Adi lalallay

*Kad-anmi ay kalawaan
Mayat si mangan-anupan
Siya san natagoan
Alapo mid nat-awan
Adi lallay adi lallay, Adi lalallay*

Our homeland that is the widest
It is a good hunting ground
It has been a source of life
Of our ancestors
Adi lallay adi lallay, Adi lalallay

*Payew mi sisinangal
Mayat si mensamsama-am
Siya san natagoan
Alapo mid nat-awan
Adi lallay adi lallay, Adi lalallay*

Our interwoven rice fields
They are a joy to till
It has been a source of life
Of our ancestors
Adi lallay adi lallay, Adi lalallay

*Kalsa mi kalipitan
Winantiyan di nangkapuan
Siya san din natagoan
Alapo mid nat-awan
Adi lallay adi lallay, Adi lalallay*

Our roads which are the narrowest
They were constructed by our ancestors
It has been a source of life
Of our ancestors
Adi lallay adi lallay, Adi lalallay

*Kad-anmi ay kalawaan
Mayat si mangan-anupan
Siya san natagoan
Alapo mid nat-awan
Adi lallay adi lallay, Adi lalallay*

Our homeland that is the widest
It is a good hunting ground
It has been a source of life
Of our ancestors
Adi lallay adi lallay, Adi lalallay

*Ginawang mi ay kalinisan
Mayat si mamingbingwitan
Siya san natagoan
Alapo mid nat-awan
Adi lallay adi lallay, Adi lalallay*

Our rivers which are the cleanest
They are good fishing grounds
A source of life
Of our ancestors
Adi lallay adi lallay, Adi lalallay

*Payew mi sisinangal
Mayat si mensamsama-am
Siya san natagoan
Alapo mid nat-awan
Adi lallay adi lallay, Adi lalallay*

Our interwoven rice fields
They are a joy to till
It has been a source of life
Of our ancestors
Adi lallay adi lallay, Adi lalallay⁴⁹



NATURE AND HUMAN BEINGS IN IGOROT MUSIC VIDEOS

In articulating the producers' notions of Igorot relationships with nature, it is important to map out their representation of the environment and the people. According to the music videos, nature is a source, home, gift, and living entity. Human beings are encouraged to be stewards of the environment. In "Kalutaan," the Earth is primarily described as a source of life (*kataguan*)⁵⁰ that human beings should avoid abusing. "Kaigorotan" follows the same narrative mode, as it acknowledges the Philippine Cordillera region and its components as sources of life (*nataguan*).⁵¹ This description is reinforced through video imagery of Igorots gathering food from their surroundings. The people in "Kalutaan" are shown picking fresh fruits such as rambutan, jackfruit, and betel.⁵² The footage captures natural and undomesticated settings (rather than farms or agricultural lots) and supports the image of the environment as the primary source of the Igorot people's daily sustenance. In "Kabanbantayan," the mountains are also called sources of life (*nataguan*).⁵³ To expound this concept, the composer specifically describes the rivers as good fishing grounds (*Mayat si mamingbingwitan*)⁵⁴ while the producer complements this relationship with videos of freshly caught fish.⁵⁵ In the song, their homeland is also characterized as a fine place to hunt in (*Mayat si mangan-anupan*).⁵⁶ According to the lyrics of "Kaigorotan," the environment is the basis of wealth (*udom ay kinabaknang*)⁵⁷ and livelihood (*danay di entako nabiyagan*)⁵⁸ for the Igorots. This dependence is also depicted in the song's accompanying videos of Igorot people using the land for small-scale agriculture and mining.⁵⁹ The music video depicts the traditional houses of some indigenous groups as representations of the provinces of Kalinga and Ifugao.⁶⁰ These images disclose the raw materials and products from the natural world that still play a significant role in the daily provision, livelihood, and shelter in Igorot culture.

According to the song "Karayan Amburayan," Amburayan and other rivers located in the Cordillera region are sources of relaxation because they are used as spots for swimming (*Mayat si panlangoyan*),⁶¹ bathing (*Mayat ngata'y pan-amesan*),⁶² and picnics (*Ay en panpiknikan*).⁶³ The song even invites members of the audience to visit the river to have a chance to relax once in a while (*manrelax sagpaminsan*).⁶⁴ The producer reinforced this imagery through several videos of tourists relaxing, swimming, and picnicking at the Amburayan River.⁶⁵ "Kabanbantayan" also does the same in some of its footage.⁶⁶ The songs aim to remind Igorots of the vital place of the environment and the region as their home since the time of their ancestors. "Kabanbantayan" regards the mountains as their homeland⁶⁷ while "Kaigorotan"



describes the region as the origin of their race (*Sinay di entako napuan*)⁶⁸ and their place of birth (*Sinay di entako naiyanakan*).⁶⁹

In the music videos, the natural world and its elements are living entities capable of feeling emotions and experiencing states of being while performing activities usually reserved for humans. The ability of the land to enact reciprocity is suggested in “Kalutaan” through the mention that the earth might not be able to take care of human beings in return if it is abused.⁷⁰ The songs declare that the sentient environment has the potential to experience emotions. “Kalutaan” suggests the possibility that rivers could hold a grudge or begin sulking (*omap-apos*) if not preserved.⁷¹ The composer also expressed the likelihood that the Earth feels exhaustion or tiredness (*Tan mo din lobong et mabbay*) because of overuse or abuse.⁷²

This view of nature is rooted in animism, one of the spiritual beliefs present in the Cordillera region as early as the country’s pre-Hispanic era, which pertains to the years before 1521. Despite the encroachment of modernity and Christianity in the daily activities and worldviews of Igorot people, traces of animism are still evident.⁷³ One distinct feature of animism is the attribution of a soul or spirit, and accompanying emotions and feelings, to plants, animals, and inanimate objects. June Prill-Brett contends that this belief has resulted in indigenous Filipinos’ respect and reverence for the natural world. She specifically notes:

Indigenous Filipinos believe that spirits inhabit certain areas of the forest, such as special trees, streams, springs, cliffs, rivers, caves and have prior rights of ownership to these places. Their rights should be respected, and permission should be sought when trespassing into their respective domains. Any violation of their sacred abode, particularly at certain designated times is believed to invite misfortune, accidents, illness and village calamities.⁷⁴

Acknowledging that other entities in the ecosystem are also alive encourages the realization that humans and nature should receive equal regard. Thus, the songs express the Igorots’ recognition of their equality with nature when it comes to their shared rights to existence and growth. This is also evident in some parts of “Kaigorotan” through the producer’s use of the non-diegetic sounds of animals such as those of birds and dogs.⁷⁵ This inclusion of such sounds in the song connotes that animals, like human beings, are integral members of the Kaigorotan and the Cordillera region.

“Kalutaan” reminds its audiences that the planet is something that they did not work (*adi iman nanbanogan*)⁷⁶ and pay for (*adi iman siyat bayadan*).⁷⁷ Moreover, humans are described as blessed (*Di mantete-e na-oney*) with bounties from nature.⁷⁸ “Kaigorotan” regards the Cordillera region and its mountains, livestock, rivers, gardens, fields, and mines as blessings from God



(*ad-adoy bendisyon en Kabunyan*).⁷⁹ In relation to the consideration of nature as a gift is the depiction of indigenous people as mere recipients, rather than owners, of nature. The lyrics refrain from expressing a sense of superiority or ownership over land, water, wildlife, and other aspects of the environment. In fact, the videos frame Igorots as small components or members of the whole ecosystem. The producers made use of wide or long shots of natural settings, placing the characters in the middle of them. For example, “Kalutaan” features a wide shot of three Igorot males at a cliff.⁸⁰ In the same music video, a wide shot of an Igorot male at the foot of a water fall in the Cordillera is shown.⁸¹

Cognizant of Igorot views of nature and its elements, the composers and producers promoted stewardship consistently as a mode of conservation. The introduction and conclusion of “Kalutaan” encourages values of stewardship. Through the lyrics, the composer calls for the avoidance of land abuse (*adi tako palaluan*)⁸² so that the land can take care of us in return (*Ta aben omay-owan*).⁸³ The song’s other verses introduce various natural elements and the ways they could be preserved. The mountain ranges (*natalunton ay dontog*)⁸⁴ should be left untouched or be allowed to remain (*bay-am matoto-od*),⁸⁵ the river (*ginawang ay madipdipos*)⁸⁶ should be allowed to flow (*bay-am ta man-ay-ayos*),⁸⁷ and the birds (*din man-it-it-it ay titit*)⁸⁸ should be left alone and not struck with a slingshot (*bay-an koman di palsiit*).⁸⁹

Indeed, stewardship is one of the key messages of “Kaigorotan.” The song encourages audiences to unite (*entako et man-es-esa*)⁹⁰ and become comrades (*entako et mankakadwa*)⁹¹ in protecting the environment despite differences between cultural groups and languages. The composer also asks his fellow Igorots not to forget or abandon the region (*kaigorotan adi tako baybay-an*)⁹² because it is the origin of their race (*sinay di entako napuan*)⁹³ and the place of their birth (*sinay di entako naiyanakan*).⁹⁴ One verse of “Karayan Amburayan” emphasizes the state of another river named Balili (*karayan di Balili, ay sino’y kan yo’s di*)⁹⁵ and asks if there is any hope for it to become free of garbage (*maga ngata’y namnama, maiwasan san basura*).⁹⁶ Though not explicitly stated, the song exhibits the composer’s intent of reminding the audiences of their responsibility to shield the Balili River from continuous abuse. Despite the encroachment of modernity and other religions in the region, traces of traditional Igorot worldviews and practices still prevail in a contemporary context, as evident in their daily activities and forms of cultural expressions. As a kind of Third Cinema, the music videos are tools for self-representation and the expression of traditional Igorot beliefs, worldviews, identities, and relationships with the environment.

From their representations of nature and themselves in the four music videos introduced in this chapter, we can draw certain inferences about how Igorots

regard nature. First, the music videos foreground an ecocentric perspective on the human-nature relationship. Ecocentrism rejects anthropocentrism—which bestows the highest value to human beings and their needs—and biocentrism, which focuses on organisms.⁹⁷ Instead, ecocentrism regards human beings, including Igorots, as members of ecosystems that are afforded equal standing with the land, mountains, water, animals, and plants. Ecocentrism involves the repositioning of “human consciousness from its privileged position at the centre of knowledge and value.”⁹⁸ To be sure, a sense of superiority or hierarchy is not ascribed to any entity or object in the music videos. Second, the music videos demonstrate a symbiotic and interdependent relationship between Igorots and nature. Since they regard the environment and the planet as living entities capable of emotions and reciprocation, Igorots are called to become stewards so nature does not become exhausted or hold a grudge. Finally, the music videos put forth the idea that Igorots have a spiritual and emotional relationship to nature. The songs provide a reminder that the Earth and its elements are gifts and blessings from Kabunyan for which the people did not necessarily work or pay. Kabunyan is traditionally believed to be the supreme god of the Igorots⁹⁹ but, in contemporary times, the name is also attributed to the Christian God. The music videos also remind Igorots themselves of their emotional connection with nature by presenting the region as the place of their birth and the origin of their race. For both spiritual and emotional reasons, therefore, the composers call for the preservation and conservation of the region.

What, then, is the relevance of examining how Igorot composers and music video producers represent nature? Images such as these provide alternative ways of perceiving social identities and roles that could be used to formulate more effective methods of managing and living with the environment. Acknowledging these perspectives of the environment serves as a preliminary step toward a “better understanding of development” that would foster the reconciliation between traditional and scientific knowledge and lead to the conceptualization of cost-effective and sustainable “survival strategies for poor and marginalized communities.”¹⁰⁰ Several indigenous traditional perspectives and practices in the Philippines have been identified and advocated by the country’s Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). One example is the system called *batangan* by the Northern Kankana-eyes or Applais in Tadian, Mountain Province. It has been characterized by the DENR as one of the country’s “sustainable traditional indigenous forest resource management systems and practices.”¹⁰¹ This recognition by a major government agency reflects scientific research into traditional practices.

In the same way, ecocritical readings of popular media items, including music videos, produced by the people of the Cordillera could be regarded as sources of environmental perspectives because they contain indigenous



“cosmovisions” for contemporary ecological planning and management. To be certain, the ecocriticism of indigenous music videos is a relatively new area of inquiry in the country. Accordingly, the influence of ecological principles and practices incorporated in music videos on living with the natural world has not yet been assessed adequately. I suggest that this gap offers vast potential for future research. Insightful as the Igorot videos seem, however, June Prill-Brett claims that there is still a need to be cautious in “romanticizing” traditional knowledge, which could become obsolete or irrelevant due to changing social, economic, cultural, and religious circumstances in the Cordillera region. She reminds us that, sometimes, indigenous knowledge that was effective in the past becomes inappropriate because of “rapid socio-economic change and interventions.”¹⁰²

THE FUTURE OF ECOCRITICISM OF INDIGENOUS POP CULTURE IN THE PHILIPPINES

This chapter examined the environmental discourse evident in contemporary cultural practices of the Igorot people of the Philippines. Indeed, several insights drawn from this discussion could prove imperative to the formulation of more effective, appropriate, and respectful environmental and developmental projects in the Philippines and Southeast Asia more widely. In the context of contemporary indigenous expressions, possible ecocritical research trajectories could pertain to (1) nature and the environment in general, (2) flora, fauna, and other specific natural elements, (3) indigenous relationships with nature, (4) modernity and development in relation to nature, (5) environmental issues, and (5) postcolonial issues.

Igorot music videos, however, are just the tip of the cultural iceberg in the Philippines. In the country’s Cordillera region, local pop culture is not limited to the *kinnoboyan* type of music. Several genres have also been appropriated by some indigenous people from provinces other than Benguet and Mountain Province. For example, the band The Living Anitos from the province of Kalinga uses ethno-pop. There is also a rising full-length film industry in the region that is slowly being recognized in local and national spaces. Regional radio and television programs featuring dramatic genres, such as radio and television dramas, and non-dramatic genres, such as news, documentaries, and magazine programs, could also contribute to the discourse. Moreover, other ethnolinguistic groups in the Philippines, including the Ilocanos, Cebuanos, Kapampangans, and Tagalogs, also have their own local pop culture industries that offer valuable perspectives on the natural world.





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