

Igorot Representation in Cordillera Picture Postcards

Anna Christie V. Torres

Benedict Anderson points to three institutions of power which metamorphosed “in form and function as the colonized zones entered the age of mechanical reproduction, namely: the census, the map and the museum” (163). I will push the map, or the cartographer’s domain, further by venturing into the cultural studio of peopled and landscape postcards. It is easy to dismiss postcards as mere commodities of capitalism or markers of and for tourism, or even as glorified places that are neither real nor authentic. Using Barthean semiotics as my mode of inquiry, I will show how these cultural markers are a powerful analytical tool in the context of colonial history and contemporary tourism. More specifically, I will illustrate how these postcards may be seen as: a site of power; a legitimizer of institutions; an arena of experiential contradictions and “parodic representations” of authorized transgressions (Hutcheon, 2003: 97). The experiences of Baguio City, Benguet as an American colonial hill station, Sagada, Mountain Province and Banaue, Ifugao, reputed gateways to the Cordillera will figure prominently in determining if and to what extent the colonial imaginings have been transcended or if new representations are emerging in the light of tourism’s serious bid to lead the service-led economies of the 21st century.

In the Realm of the Studio

Of all the modes of representation, the photograph is the most easily assimilated into the discourses of knowledge and truth, for it is thought to be “an unmediated simulacrum, a copy of what we consider ‘real’” (Shapiro, 1988: 124). Picture postcards therefore lend themselves well to theorizing the social and political order which, in the case of Philippine colonial history, helped concretize and hasten the grand American design of conquest.

From the perspective of the colonial cartographer, specific sites, boundaries and frontiers became more than dots, curves and lines on paper. To illustrate this, I will extend Benedict Anderson's (2003) idea of the map as manifestation of imagined colonial rule (163) by focusing on vintage and contemporary landscape and peopled postcards. More than the map, the postcards' photographic images serve as living proof of colonial acquisition. As such, Benito Vergara writes that the photograph "entails the ownership of a possessed and objectified subject specifically meant to evoke memories of the same possessed and objectified colony" (27).

Using Barthean semiotics as my mode of inquiry, I will show how postcards may be read as texts and interpreted as: a site of power, an arena of contradictions, a legitimizer of institutions and "parodic representations" of authorized transgressions (Hutcheon, 2003: 97). As a powerful analytical tool, postcards may be examined and interrogated to re-semanticize the dominant ideology present in these "visual referents."

Roland Barthes argues that representation, or the production of meaning through language or other ways of signification operates by way of two separate but linked processes. In the first, the signifiers or the elements of the image and the signifieds or the concepts, unite to form a sign read on a simple denotative level. The second level of signification is connotation or myth where the completed sign is interpreted in terms of the wider realms of social ideology – the general beliefs, conceptual frameworks and value systems of society (Hall, 2002: 38-39). In other words, myth deals with "fragments of an ideology ... [and has] a very close communication with culture, knowledge, history and it is through them ... that the environmental world [of the culture] invades the system [of representation]" (39). Like a double-edged sword, myth has the power to make natural and innocent something that is profoundly pre-figured. Barthes exposes the duplicity of myth in his analysis of *The Blue Guide*, a French travel guide book. By focusing on landscape photographs, he illustrates

how the promotion of “the old Alpine myth of the mountains” in the tourism industry fosters the false notion of “morality and civic virtue” among the middle class (74).

As cultural products, postcards are not only visual representations but more significantly, are powerful bearers of ideology. In the context of Philippine history therefore, they document colonial and capitalist encounters that framed and continue to frame the subject within the boundaries of primitive and exotic display. The representations imaged and imagined in these postcards have become naturalized. In the present-day industry of tourism for instance, the colonial design of conquest is evident. Rolando Tolentino (2001) posits that:

As geography is imbued with passivity, activity then is generated through [the] bodies [of people] as generic signifiers of exoticism, whether these are single models posed in some natural tourist attraction or masses of people sweating through a religious procession. The native bodies are exoticized, denied their particularities ... [a] body is made substitutable for another in the fulfillment of the desire to conquer and know (19).

And among the wide range of tourism paraphernalia that promotes this mode of conquest by means of the exoticization and objectification of bodies, the postcard is the most popular. Following the construct of myth, an Igorot portrayed in a postcard embodies Igorots in general. The repeated exoticized representation is thus “normalized” and subsequently supports and generates the concept of desire and conquest introduced by the colonizers. This means that such myth allows the exotic native to be desired and conquered many times over.

Technically, the postcard is a site marker that doubles as a memento. But more importantly, it is an object that embodies subject formation of the native that needs to be interrogated and verified within the context of the native’s ethnicity and history.

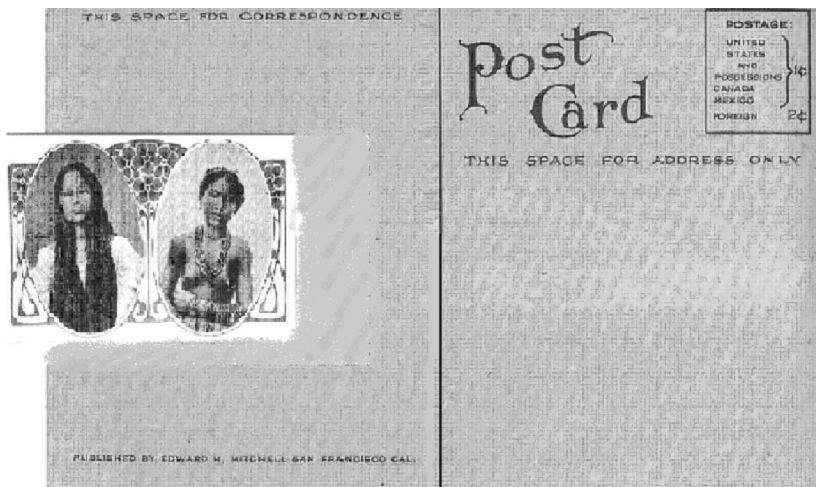


Figure 1. Back of Postcard (with figure 2 superimposed).

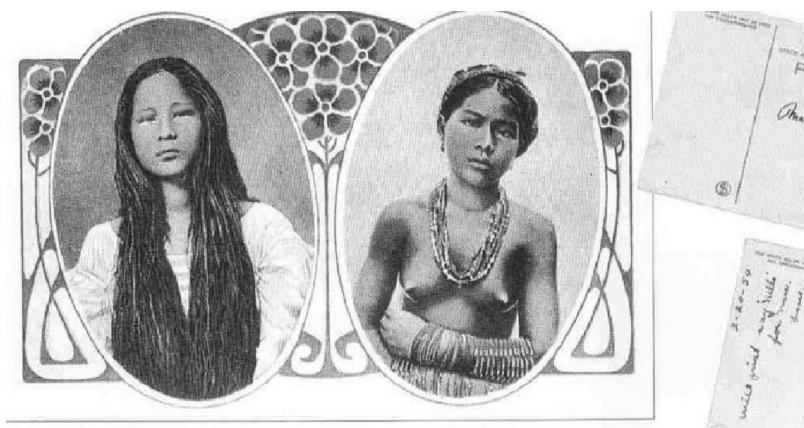


Figure 2. Typical Manila girl and her uncivilized sister.

Just as it can be read as an instrument of misrepresentation, it can also allow ample space for intervention in the Igorot's attempt at exercising social agency and [re]constructing his/her cultural identity.

Circulating the Colonial

The arrival of the Americans in 1898 impacted greatly on the production of picture postcards in the Philippines. Apart from a flood of American soldiers, teachers and tourists into the country, a lesser known event occurred. The United States Congress passed a bill lowering the postal rate for postcards by fifty percent. Almost overnight, “the postcard fad, already in full swing in Europe came to America and the Philippines (Best, 1994: 1).

The first of two notable details in the standard format of an American-made postcard is the box reserved for postage: United States and *possessions* (emphasis mine), Canada and Mexico” (Figure 1). The subject position of colonizer is underscored, relegating the colonized to a tiny box, literally and figuratively. The second detail is the postcard’s publisher, Edward Mitchell of San Francisco, California. Jonathan Best writes that by the first decade of the 20th century, the postcard business was “highly internationalized” (4). Most of the publishers were in Manila, with stiff competition from American-based firms. Mitchell was one of the biggest producers in America, and following the colonizer-colonized set-up, capitalized on the exotica of the latest possession for a highly marketable “Philippine Series.”

Igorot, the collective term used to refer to the inhabitants of the Cordillera, north Luzon, Philippines, is a highly politicized term. According to eminent Cordillera historian William Henry Scott (1987), “Igorot” may be traced to the word *Igolot*, the root word *golot* meaning “mountain chain,” and the prefix *in* meaning “people of” or “dwellers in” (44a). Scott notes that although there are no records of these mountain people referring to themselves as Igorots, it would be more likely that this was what they were referred to by the other inhabitants from the lowlands. Likewise, early Spanish accounts say nothing about traditional hostility between the mountaineers and the lowlanders. In fact, records reveal the existence of “Igorot-lowland cooperation, as the barter system of trade was common between the Igorots and the Ilocanos,

for example (47a). The Spanish *conquistadores* embarked on five expeditions to the Baguio gold fields during their first fifty years in Luzon and during these explorations, referred to all the pagan mountain peoples as Igorots (Ibid.). The Spanish colonizers repeatedly failed in their gold mining expeditions in the hinterlands and in Christianizing and thus colonizing these mountain peoples. They thus relocated the Igorots to the margins of Philippine history and culture as *barbaros* and *paganos*, emphasizing the Igorots' difference from the lowland Filipinos they were breeding to constitute the colonial society (xb).

The imagined highland-lowland tension created by the colonizers to further marginalize the Igorots is captured in Figure 2. Captioned "Typical Manila Girl and her Uncivilized Sister," the postcard illustrates the created contrasts between a Christianized and thus civilized maiden with a savage, unconverted heathen. The word "sister" lends a touch of irony because it establishes a link that is nonetheless absent.



Figure 3. Portrait of an Igorot constabulary recruit.

Notably, the postcard's design strengthens the non-linkage. It is a double vignette, two medium shots individually framed in ovals that will never intersect. Also, these ovals reflect the creation of a distinction between lowland and highland Filipinos which "contrasted submission, conversion, and civilization on the one hand, with paganism and savagery on the other" (Scott, 1987: 7b).

America, the newcomer in the race for empire, inherited this concept and capitalized on this difference. The colonial eye saw the Igorot as the pure tribe that

was thus conveniently thrust in the grand scheme of manifest destiny. Conceptualized as a “modernizing, benevolent mission” (Rafael, 2000: 83), American colonization sought to civilize and save the Igorot from the clutches of ignorance.

Figure 3 is a studio portrait of an Igorot Constabulary recruit who is dressed to the hilt – Sebastopol hat, pistol, regulation shirt and g-string (loincloth). His hat and gun, symbols of empire announce that even the native savage can be civilized and transformed into an ally. But if the subject has been made to wear the Western long-sleeved shirt, why not the pants to match? The g-string is the ultimate exotic garb that identifies the native. He may possess the ability to learn and be civilized but he remains inferior to the colonial master. The subject must know his place in the colonial scheme of things. The Igorot recruit is further decontextualized by the studio’s painted backdrop. The grasses and leaves strewn on the floor only highlight his unnatural state.

Colonial postcards, as Elizabeth Holt (2002) emphasizes, “did not just assist in the circulation of the colonial but were an actual site for its dissemination” (102). Figure 4 is an early street scene in Baguio, 1901. It is a rustic, rural scene, with tree-lined

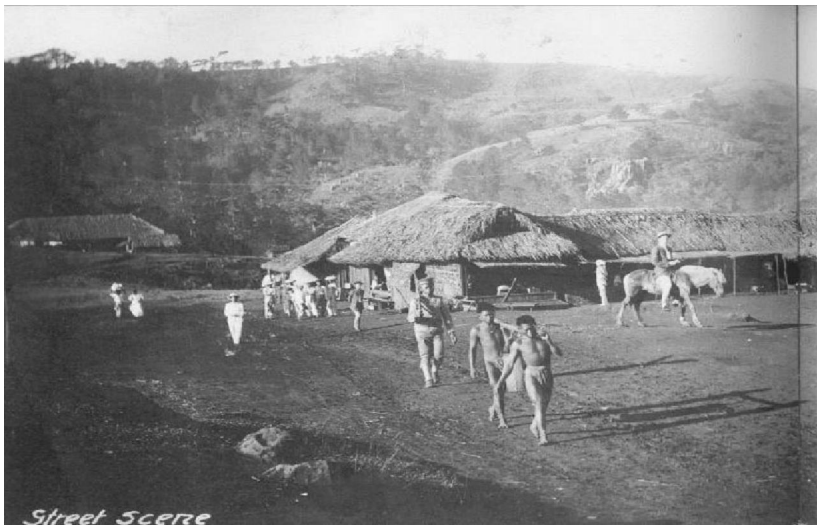


Figure 4. Early street scene, Baguio, 1901.

mountains looming in the background, attesting to the land's agricultural and mineral abundance. The undeveloped space was, in the words of the late Edward Said, "something inviting" colonialism (219a). The colonial masters had indeed invited themselves into highland territory. In the photo's foreground are two unshod, g-string-clad natives carrying a big object attached to a pole. Other passersby in Western garb appear to be strolling casually along. A uniformed sentry, who is visibly non white, patrols the area. But the most arresting figures are those of two white males, in full cowboy regalia. Their mark of superiority is reinforced by the fact that they are on horseback. All the others, including the sentry, supposedly a figure of authority are on foot. The colonial cowboys, in the grand tradition of the famed United States cavalry appear to be rounding up the herd of subjects.

Inconsistencies in the Imagined Representations

The contemporary postcards included in this section onwards reflect a new pattern of dominance recognized in "consumer culture," whose central features include, among others, a "reorganization of space and characteristics of multinational capital" (Said, 1993: 323b). Baguio, summer capital of the Philippines and dubbed the city of pines, is an American-constructed space characterized mainly as a highland resort typical of colonial hill stations built by the British and the Dutch. As a tourist hub, the colonial media have packaged Baguio as a major "rest and recreation" (R and R) space, creating a veritable iconography of "Igorotness" – g-strings, *tapis* (skirt), *bulol* (deity statue) and other woodcarvings. This has helped reinforce the commodification of the Igorots and their culture.

Figure 5 is a Camp John Hay postcard, probably printed in the 1980s, before the facility was formally turned over to the Philippine government by the U.S. in 1991. The postcard is designed as a neat and balanced collage of seven different shots. Three of these underscore the iconography of Igorotness: first, the hand

woven material held up interestingly by a tattoo-laden arm of a native; second, the *babag* or g-string immortalized in the stone statue of an Igorot warrior; and third, the Igorot woodcarver at work on a figure of a native warrior. The layout of the card, that is, the octagonal shape of the collage itself likewise mimics the outline of the shield used by the warriors in battle.

The postcard lends the impression that all seven attractions may be found in the Armed Forces Recreation Center. Even the caption supports this (Figure 6). But of the seven landmarks, only two are within the 250 hectares of the campsite: the shot of the receiving room of one of the buildings and the structure overlooking a grassy slope, which, according to a Baguio old-timer, was formerly the office of the base commander and his staff, transformed into the Igorot Lodge after the turnover, and currently leased to the Asian Institute of Management (AIM).

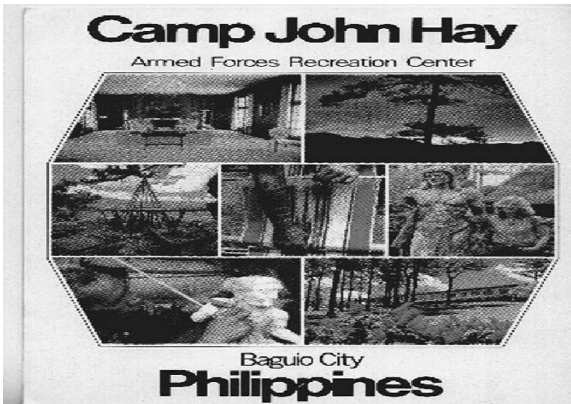


Figure 5.
Camp John Hay.

Military Resort in the heart of Baguio City, the mountain summer capital, with 83 cottages, old fashioned lodge or hotel style rooms, color televisions, dining, lounges and native gardens, indoor-outdoor sports and recreational facilities, including a world famous golf course. **For all eligible military personnel/ DOD Civilians and their family** (emphasis mine)

Figure 6.
Caption of Camp John Hay Postcard.

The idea of the Igorot as exotic other is heightened in the next photo of a white woman linking arms with a statue of a g-string clad warrior. Her wide grin reflects the cheap thrills of posing beside an Igorot male represented as an exotic macho figure. Curiously though, the photo's setting is the Baguio Botanical Gardens (formerly Imelda Park) along Leonard Wood Road and not Camp John Hay as the postcard suggests. Neither is there a woodcarving village in camp, as implied by the photo of an Igorot male carver at work. The final piece of the collage seems to underscore the commanding presence of the sprawling facility. The fact that the structure was never really an attraction before and after American control raises speculation as to why it is even in the picture at all. Perhaps it is an attempt at emphasizing to all "eligible. Department of Defense (DOD) civilians and their

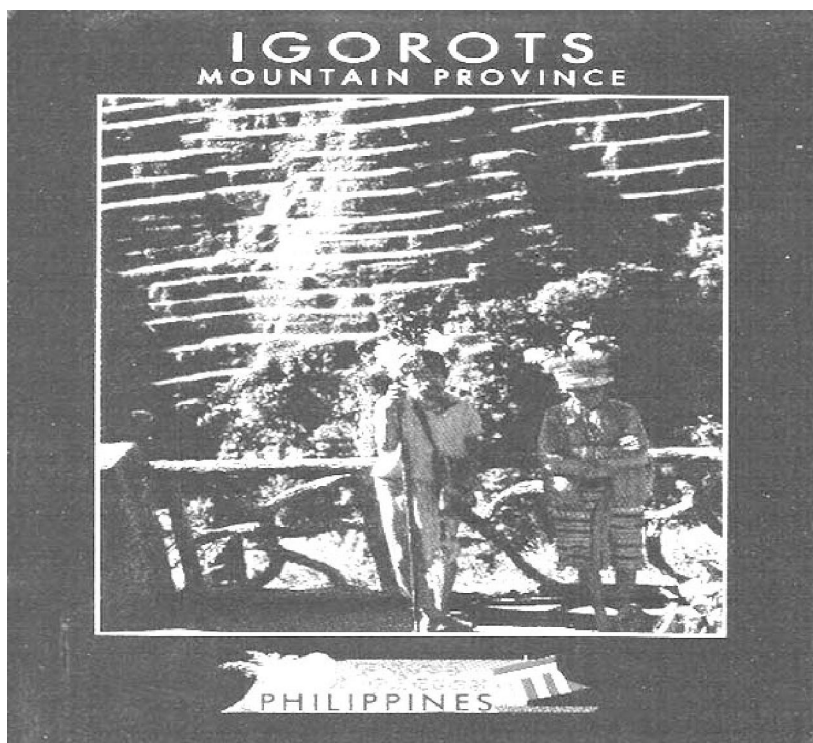


Figure 7. Igorots: Mountain Province

family” as well as those outside this sphere that the authority exuded by the base officials is as far-reaching and unyielding as the entire facility itself.

The next two figures illustrate ethnic and geographic inconsistencies that are perhaps largely due to our lack of general knowledge of and/or concern for accuracy. Figure 7 is part of a “Faces and Places, Philippines” series (reminiscent of Edward Mitchell’s “Philippine Series”), with the photographer winning in the Best of the Islands Photo Contest in March 1997. In both the main heading and caption, the Igorot subjects are labeled as the natives of Mountain Province, which is only *one* of the six provinces comprising the Cordillera Administrative region (CAR). The subjects have been made to pose in the view deck overlooking the Banaue rice terraces which are located in Ifugao province. Ironically, the faces do not match the places. Interestingly, there is a careful and deliberate effort to describe the backdrop: “... awarded as the international historic civil engineering landmarks by the American Society of Civil Engineers,” but there is no attempt to foreground the inhabitants or at the very least, correctly call attention to their ethnicity. In other words, the subjects merely serve as props to reinforce what Barthes (1984) calls the “hybrid compound of the cult of nature and puritanism” (74). The Banaue rice terraces represent the monument of “regeneration of spirit through clean air” (Ibid.) that the market society promotes by way of tourism paraphernalia such as postcards. The Ifugao couple is only incidental in the process of spiritual regeneration through nature and therefore does not require verification.

The next figure (Figure 8) is even more problematic. The subject is a native woman wearing a blouse of hand woven material. She is at work on a loom and is weaving a bright red cloth as curious onlookers watch in the sidelines. The caption poses a problem: “cloth weaver – Mindanao, Philippines.” June Prill-Brett, leading scholar on the Cordillera, points out that the photo is not set down south in Mindanao but up north in Banaue, Ifugao where actual weaving scenes for public viewing are common.



Figure 8. Cloth weaver, Mindanao, Philippines.

She surmises that the woman is in the business of weaving and selling Ifugao, Kankanai and Bontoc traditional cloth as proven by the samples of woven material hanging on the ledge. Prill-Brett (personal interview, November 13, 2003) adds that the detail of the wooden leg of the house indicates that it is a house on stilts, typical of Ifugao houses. The stilts serve as rat guards to prevent rodents from getting into the rice stock stored in the houses. In other places in the Cordillera, only the granaries, which are separate structures, are on stilts (J. Prill-Brett, personal interview, August 4, 2004).

The propensity for inaccuracies raises a valid point in countering the practice of generalizing indigenous peoples of the Philippines. There seems to be a generic category applied to ethnic groups so that the indigenous peoples from the south are lumped under those from the north. One indigenous group is made to represent an entire social category that leaves no space for the exercise of subjectivity. Typecast, the unique features of each group are dispensed with because since these people are “minorities,” their varied cultures are insignificant. Given the limited opportunities for indigenous groups in general, and Igorots

in particular, to enter the public space, what squeezes through becomes typical of natives as a whole. In the end therefore, it is ironic that the inconsistencies stand out as the real elements while the photographic images themselves remain imagined. In other words, while knowledge about indigenous peoples continues to be limited and inaccurate, what could be seen as additional information gleaned from postcards only exacerbates the already limited and muddled cultural representation. The dominant myth created by the colonizers is equated with the real. Perceptions about the native continue to be imagined and formulated with the wrong frame of reference, doing little to change what the colonial mind had framed.

Tourism and the Poverty of Representation

The postcard industry has helped in the construction and commodification of two popular destinations outside Baguio as “authentic” must-see places for one to savor the true Cordillera experience. Figure 9 is a semi-collage highlighting Banaue and Sagada. The map illustrates the impression of accessibility, so that any adventurous backpacker may be able to visit the two places

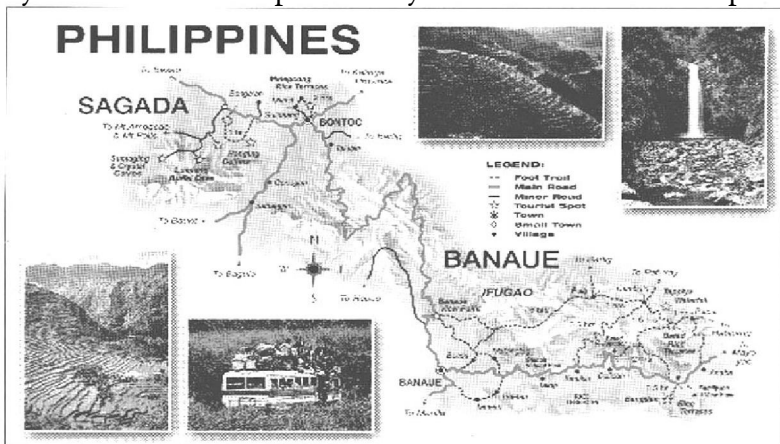


Figure 9. Philippines: Sagada and Banaue.

almost effortlessly, or so he/she thinks. Likewise, the postcard compares the two destinations using very neat and nearly equal photos and boldface markers. While Banaue takes pride in the Batad and Bangaan rice terraces, Sagada has the Malegcong rice terraces. Banaue may have the Tapplya waterfalls but Sagada has the Sumaguing and Lumiang caves, as well as the hanging coffins, all supplied for the visitor in tit-for-tat precision.

Jonathan Culler (1988) writes that the distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic, the natural and the touristy, is a powerful semiotic operator of tourism (159). The idea of seeing unspoiled or off-the-beaten-track places like these, supported by the caption: “overcrowded public bus [that passes] through rice fields of [the] Banaue and Sagada countryside,” is essential to the structure of tourism. The authentic is a usage perceived as a sign of that usage, and largely, tourism is a “quest for such signs” (Ibid.). However, the dilemma of authenticity is that “the authentic sight requires markers, but our notion of the authentic is the unmarked (164). This postcard effectively captures the marked “authentic” features of both Banaue and Sagada, one of which, specifically the rice terraces, has become commodified and made part of Igorot iconography. In other words, the tourism industry has packaged Banaue and Sagada by way of the myth of the Cordillera as a place where rice terraces abound, so that a tight association between place and tourist attraction is formed and continuously reinforced by postcards like this one.

Unfortunately, too, it is the mere icon that stands out in the postcard, reinforcing what Andrew Tolson (1996) calls “the idealized expression” (166). When one looks at a landscape, one may be looking at a real place, but one is also looking through eyes which have been taught to focus on a particular field of vision, a place as “timeless, traditional and expressive of a spirituality which cannot be found in the lowlands” (169). Semiotically, this field of vision is middle class in nature, perpetuated by a capitalist economy that targets the middle class as its market. The modern middle

class traveler, Barthes writes, “enjoy[s] a kind of new-born euphoria in buying effort, in keeping [his/her] image and essence without feeling any of its ill-effects” (76). By reducing geography and culture to mere monuments or tourist attractions, the reality of the land and the people is suppressed. It “accounts for nothing of the present, that is, nothing historical, and as a consequence, the monuments themselves become undecipherable, therefore senseless” (76). The tourist bubble is intended to ensure that the visitors will be kept happy and will be spared of the inconveniences and unsanitary conditions endured by the indigenous inhabitants. What matters is that the big business of tourism and its accompanying “tourist imagery” is perpetuated and protected (Giddens, 1994: 238).

Tourism remains the biggest industry in the world and ecotourism the fastest growing section in the international tourism market. Research shows that “together with telecommunications and information technology, travel and tourism has been identified as one of the three ‘paradigm service industries that will drive the service-led economies of the 21st century’ (“Economic perks,” 2004). The Cordillera is home to the World Heritage site-designated rice terraces and diverse indigenous cultures. According to the Philippine government it is an “ideal tourist site,” meaning it intends to generate income through ecotourism while promoting environmental awareness and preservation of the cultural and natural diversity at the same time (Frei, 2002: 2). Yet ecotourism is still a highly contentious term in that an internationally recognized definition which would clarify what criteria are to be used to measure its implementation is yet to be formulated (3).

As the debate rages, government, through the Department of Tourism (DOT) continues to project tourism as an institution that, as a Wealth of Wonders (WOW) Cordillera poster succinctly puts it, “inspires pride in our country’s natural attractions and heritage,” and is one that “can help our country’s economy.” But consider Figure 10, a postal card that bears witness to the prepaid

era. A joint project of the Philippine Postal Corporation (Philpost) and the DOT, in support of the “Visit Philippines 2003” program, the twenty-peso “postage prepaid postal card” already comes with a postage stamp and can be mailed effortlessly “to any part of the world.” The postcard attempts to blend together the various cultures of the Cordillera. The Banaue rice terraces are in the background, with no less than President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (PGMA) wearing a Kankanai costume and a headdress of beads, fully engaged in the art of weaving. A close inspection reveals that she is not using a traditional highlands back strap loom but an upright variety commonly used in the lowlands. The intent of foregrounding the Cordillera and her peoples is thus rendered questionable. This is reinforced by the digital technological device of layering. PGMA is just added onto the photo, as if for good measure. She is not really in the picture. In fact, she is neither here nor there but in limbo, afloat, alienated and detached from the concerns of the Cordillera and her inhabitants. What is foregrounded here instead is the demonstrably “inauthentic

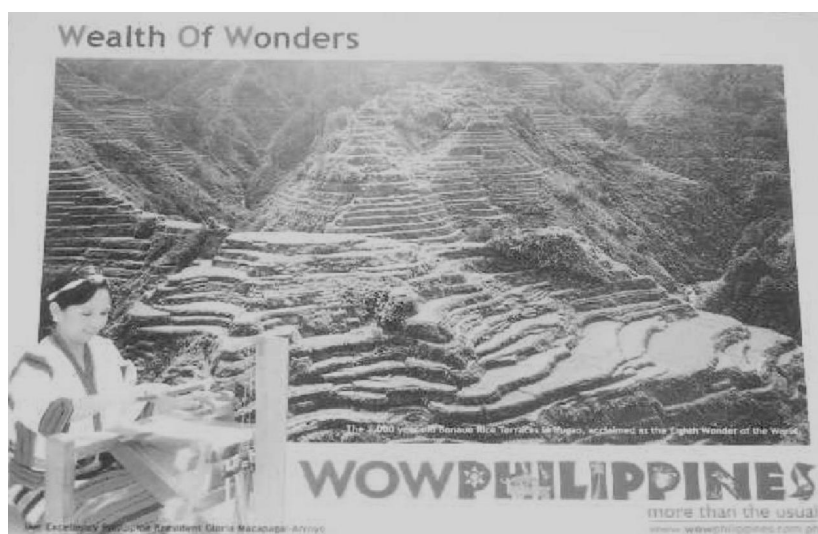


Figure 10. WOW! Philippines pre-paid postcard.



Figure 11. Philippines (Parade).

experience of tourism, a carefully crafted artifice from beginning to end, developed and hyped for tourist consumption” (Giddens, 1994: 237). This means that tourism is foremost a big capitalist venture and it acts to maximize the appeal of the pristine natural attractions and exotic inhabitants. PGMA, so to speak, is just the icing on the cake.

In the midst of all these, Igorot culture continues to be mobilized to create a simulacrum of marginalized indigenous peoples being incorporated into the national sphere (Figure 11). However, this integration is only “for show.” In the inset and larger photos, non-Cordillerans, probably government employees and students in full Igorot regalia are preparing for a parade. The postcard’s images imply that the lowland-highland divide has been dismantled, and that now, the Igorot is at home in the asphalt jungle. But inclusion of the Igorot in the concept of nation is only done too easily in the tradition of the festival, like the parades in these photos. In festival, Gerardo Lico (2003) asserts, “the border between ...dominant and subjugated, rich and poor and other dualities [are] temporarily blurred in theatrical moments that

celebrate community and common rites of passage” (16). Utilizing lowlanders to cross-dress as Igorots in the tradition of spectacle or a choreographed event only divert our attention from the fact that the Igorot continues to be marginalized, devoid of power to assert his/her cultural identity. Not surprisingly, in the concept of nation-building, the Igorot remains absent. Postcards such as this one advertise the incorporation of indigenous peoples like the Igorots in the imaging and imagining of nation. But this information promo only yields the production of what Jean Baudrillard (2001) refers to as “a decoy, or a semblance of reality that is meant to lure us away from the essence of the issue” (68), in this case, the continuing marginalization of the Igorot. As we continue with the involution of the Igorot in this superficial likeness of the reality of nation, the further we move towards this direction. The brief caption that reads “Philippines” seals the powerful simulacrum effect of the postcard.

De-doxification and Other Weapons of Intervention

The preceding discussion has shown how postcards may legitimize existing institutions and power relations. But the same medium may also be “used against itself to de-doxify that authority and power” and reveal how its representational strategies construct an imagined history and culture (Hutcheon, 2003: 43-44). I am using *doxa* here to refer to Barthes and Hutcheon’s general notion of it as “public opinion” or the ‘voice of nature’ and consensus (3). More simply, I will illustrate how the visual and verbal codes of cultural representations may be broken to reveal the tensions and interventions that are present and subtly directed against authority. Figure 12 is a rather unusual shot of the Baguio city market, specifically the far end of the tourist section of the market. Baguio residents take pride in their clean and orderly city market, especially the famed tourist section which showcases a wide array of souvenir items such as soft brooms, men in barrels, humongous phallic wooden ashtrays, *pasikings* (native backpacks), and so on, and fresh



Figure 12. Baguio market.

mountain produce like strawberries, button mushrooms, cauliflower, broccoli, and many more. But the photographer has, wittingly or unwittingly, chosen to privilege lowland vegetables – tomatoes of the Taiwan variety (which has a longer shelf life), *sitaw*, *okra*, *ampalaya*, *talong*, *patola*, *upo* (local vegetables), thus breaking, if only momentarily, the mold of Igorot iconography. Unknowingly perhaps, this privileging acknowledges Baguio’s lesser known but valued role as trading center in the north and melting pot of cultures.

Figure 13 is a medium shot of three Ifugao *baket* (female elders). It also calls attention to three striking details: first, the brightly plumed native headgear of the smiling women; second, the strings of colorful beads around their necks; and third, the caption: “Banaue rice girls.” Following James C. Scott’s (1993) notion of the “weapons of the weak” (90), I will illustrate how the powerless, in this case the Igorots, exploit the same system that takes advantage of their culture. Tourists always go for what they perceive as authentic; the more colorful or outrageous, the more authentic. The headgear of the three women is pseudo-native. Each head ornament has a baseball cap of native material

as its base, topped with pompoms of various sizes and hues, and feathers from a native chicken probably slaughtered for a *pinikipikan* (native chicken soup) meal. Their necklaces of colorful beads are plastic. Perhaps the only authentic neckpiece is the choker of the basket in the center. Her pendant is of the traditional *ling-ling* design, noted as a fertility symbol because it resembles a woman's ovaries. The caption uses word substitution intended for a humorous effect. Banaue has been so closely identified with the rice terraces and vice versa, but in this postcard, three "rice girls" have taken center stage. In fact, even the background is not recognizably that of the famed Banaue landmark. The photo could have been taken in Baguio's Botanical Garden, also known as Imelda Park, where tourists can pose and be photographed with natives for a fee. The caption may apply to what Andrew Tolson (1996) calls "the knowing consumer," (10) who is able to make intertextual connections. More specifically, it may be seen in reference to an American TV sitcom popular in the 1980s called *The Golden Girls*. The show revolved around the lives of three widowed or divorced American senior citizens who decided to live together and enjoy many a rambunctious escapade in their golden years. In a sense, the same mood is evoked by the postcard of the Banaue



Figure 13. Banaue rice girls.



Figure 14. The Banaue rice terraces (with a male elder).

rice girls who have easily put one over the institution that continues to take advantage of their culture and traditions.

Figure 14 shows how contemporary postcards are still cast in the same colonial mold. The rice terraces dominate the backdrop. In the foreground is a *lallakay* (male elder) posing before the camera in a g-string and a long suit or trench coat. His accessories include a spear, a headdress and what seems to be a small bag of the same material as his loincloth. A clump of Ifugao huts and some trees are just below the rice tier platform where the subject stands. The formula is familiar – the trees and rice shoots allude to a fertile land. The thatched huts may break the concept of primitive farming methods, but the inhabitants remain primitives who are bound to the land because they risk “becoming ‘inauthentic,’ deprived or lost when they depart from ‘traditional farming’” (McKay, 1999: 126).

But note the *lallakay*'s clenched fist as he holds the bag and the apparent frown on his face. Could it be that he has had enough? Even the trench coat or suit, the “first ruling class costume to idealize ‘purely sedentary’ power” (Berger, 1991: 424) is appropriated by the *lallakay*. He does not appear to be inhibited by the suit. Actually, he seems to have taken matters into his own

hands and has neither rolled nor folded, but pulled up the sleeves, exposing only the cuffs. He has also managed to leave the coat unbuttoned to display his native garb. All these as if to defiantly proclaim, “who says only Englishmen can wear suits?”

Contemporary postcards such as the ones we have seen clearly show how in our consumer society, cultural representations still carry vivid traces of what postmodernists call “the grand narratives of our colonial culture and history” (Hutcheon, 2003: 119). By and large, the Igorot has not been allowed to leap beyond the frame. How can this be possible when the same myths that misrepresent the native and legitimize colonial and capitalist paradigms continue to proliferate? Although tourism continues to paint vibrant pictures of commerce and progress, a poverty of representation persists for peoples like the Igorots in the crucial arena of economics and politics. However, on a postmodernist note, postcards may also be seen as a form of ironic representation, or what Hutcheon calls parody, a “self-reflexive technique that points to art as art but also to art as inescapably bound to its aesthetic and even social past” (97). Simply put, myth as a double-edged sword could likewise be “double-coded,” meaning it can subvert and transgress that which is being parodied (Ibid.). As the preceding discussion shows, postcards may be read as subtle attempts of the Igorot at contestation and intervention. In a way, these attempts underscore the postcard’s vital role in the interrogation and negotiation of identities so that the knowledge we procure from this visual medium is one that continuously and actively engages the inhabitants and their mountain domain.

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Anna Christie V. Torres is an assistant professor at the College of Arts and Communication, University of the Philippines in Baguio City. She is enrolled in the Ph.D. Philippine Studies program of the College of Arts and Letters in U.P. Diliman.