



## Creativity, Self, and Society (CSS)

---

Faculty of Arts, Hong Kong Baptist University

Creativity, Self, and Society Online Working Paper Series

No. 04/ NICTC

---

*Issue: Negotiating Identity and Creativity in Times of Crisis*

### The Pliant Indigenous Body: Igorot Domestic Migrant Activism in Social Media

Jose Kervin Cesar B. Calabias  
Lingnan University

---

To cite this paper:

# The Pliant Indigenous Body: Igorot Domestic Migrant Activism in Social Media

Jose Kervin Cesar B. Calabias

Jose Kervin Cesar B. Calabias is an Igorot Kankana-ey scholar from Baguio City, Philippines. He holds a BA and MA in Language and Literature from the University of the Philippines, and he is currently a PhD candidate of the Department of Cultural Studies at Lingnan University in Hong Kong where he is a recipient of the Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme and the Belt and Road Scholarship awards. He also taught courses on literature and arts at De La Salle University in Manila, Philippines; e-mail: josekervincecalabias@ln.hk

## Abstract

This paper is a partial examination of Igorot domestic workers, Indigenous peoples from the Cordillera region of the Philippines, and their activism staged in social media's networked (and refracted) publics. Through participant observation of the online launch of #DefendCordilleraPH and its concurrent activities, I tentatively describe the contrasting qualities of the networked and refracted publics as potentially "expanding" the limited public spaces of domestic workers and the restrictive conditions of their labor in Hong Kong. Migrating online has demonstrated this transgressive "flexibility" of presence and participation that expanded the spatial and temporal limitations of their labor while at the same time allowing them to subvert their colonially abjected bodies as Indigenous peoples. Further, their online campaigns and activities that were brought about by several COVID19 pandemic and labor restrictions in place have also allowed the "relocation" and "expansion" of ancestral land rights advocacy into the digital topography that could potentially expand the reach of the discourses of "ancestral land" and its value to Indigenous migrants. Finally, while the state of Indigenous peoples and their activism remain increasingly "virulent" as their advocacies hope to get "viralized," these qualities of Igorot activism in the digital diaspora reflect the distinct "pliancy" of the Igorot-domestic and how they could continue to overcome different forms of restrictions "away" from home.

## *Keywords*

body, domestic worker, Hong Kong, Igorot, migrant activism, social media

## Introduction

In the early hours of dawn on October 25, 2020, in Lubuagan, Kalinga, a composite team from the Philippine National Police (PNP) and the 503rd Infantry Brigade of the Philippine Army searched the house of and arrested 50-year-old Indigenous peasant leader Beatrice Belen. The search warrants alleged Belen of illegal possession of firearms and explosives. While the military searched their home, Belen and her husband and two grandchildren were led outside. She was arrested after the team purportedly found three rifle grenades (CPA). Belen's organization, Gabriela, a progressive women's rights group, claims that she was illegal-

ly arrested and victim of "red-tagging" by state forces (Talabong "Red-Tagged"). The Commission on Human Rights (CHR) of the country warns about the severity and the implication of being red-tagged or branded as supporters of the ongoing armed insurgency of the Communist Party of the Philippines and its military wing, the New People's Army, adding that these relate to the "context of increasing number of reported extrajudicial killings in rural areas alongside the intensified counterinsurgency program of the government" (Gavilan 2020). Belen's arrest also came during a nationwide community quarantine and lockdown due to the COVID19 pandemic, crippling local and national economic activities and activists, political mobilizations, and demonstrations. These organizations have since moved many of their campaigns to online social media spaces, including calls for the immediate release and the scrapping of trumped-up charges against the peasant woman leader. The call to "Free Betty Belen" coincided with the launch of the global campaign "#DefendCordilleraPH" in September that year, which seeks to raise awareness on Igorot issues and campaigns and promote activities from allied institutions, organizations, and movements worldwide that were initiated by Philippine-based organization, the Cordillera Peoples Alliance (CPA). Belen identifies as Igorot or the collective and popular identity of several Indigenous ethnolinguistic groups in the Cordillera region and its six provinces on the major island of Luzon. Her illegal arrest has since been raised on various online platforms, not just among the Igorot but from other international Indigenous groups and their organizations. On February 12, 2021, after almost four months of detention, Belen was released after the court dismissed charges filed by the PNP. However, while she walks free, the entire country is still under the "world's longest COVID-19 lockdown" (See, "Rodrigo Duterte"), and the campaign to #DefendCordilleraPH remains as the widely contested Philippine Anti-Terror Law is still in full effect.

Despite the Supreme Court receiving 37 petitions to repeal the law or issue a temporary restraining order, citing the violation of 15 of the 22 rights in the Philippine constitution, including free speech and assembly (Buan "Anti-Terror"), the Anti-Terror Law continues to worsen the human rights condition in the country most especially for the most vulnerable population such as rural Indigenous peoples, which, coincidentally, were among the first to be formally accused using the controversial law. This case filed against two Aeta Indigenous farmers for violations under the Anti-Terror Law was recently dismissed on insufficient evidence, making the warrantless arrests of the accused illegal (Patag "Court Junks"). This reveals the dangerous limits of a law that provides an ambiguous definition of terrorism without a clear delineation between dissent and terrorism, along with "a provision that allows

for longer detention without an arrest warrant or judicial intervention" (Beltran "Battle Over"). As Indigenous communities are made more vulnerable to the weaponization of the law and the flood of social media posts on various platforms that advocate justice and human rights, activism became a frontline work in a country that prioritizes political vilification over pandemic response.

Against this backdrop of crisis, this paper offers a partial examination of how activism is supported and continued in Hong Kong by Igorot domestic worker activists culled from my ongoing ethnographic research on these Indigenous migrant women. Through my participant observation during the global #DefendCordilleraPH campaign and its concurrent activities, including the Free Betty Belen movement, I deploy certain conditions and dynamics of the "networked" (boyd 39) and "refracted" (Abidin 2-3) publics of social media, interfacing with the commodification of the Filipina domestic (Tadiar 157) and the abject archiving of the Indigenous exotic body (Balce 2016; Rice 2015), to tentatively describe Igorot domestic worker activism in social media. Their "migration" to the digital spaces has primarily been due to the COVID19 pandemic restrictions in Hong Kong and the Philippines. However, these seemingly restrictive conditions have inadvertently "expanded" their activism in many ways. Specifically, through their activism, they have transgressed the restrictions of their contracted labor and the public spaces they occupy alongside the subversion of their colonially abjected bodies as Indigenous peoples. The unique qualities of the simultaneously networked and refracted publics that provide the platform of their activism also allowed for certain "flexibility" in their presence and political participation, which goes beyond their mandated "rest" day in Hong Kong and their "domestic" space of employment. Primarily advocating for ancestral land rights has also relocated their struggle for "home" into the unique digital topography that has, in turn, expanded the reach of their advocacies to different geographic, spatial, and temporal contexts. This state of "unrest" through their virtual political participation demonstrates social mediality and body "pliancy"; as social media intervenes and compliments their day-to-day domesticity and activism, their otherwise appropriated Indigenous bodies and notions of ancestral land rights become potent sites of agency against the increasing violence on Indigenous peoples back home.

### **Profiling the Filipina Domestic Worker**

Despite Filipino overseas work having several forms of labor, it has inevitably taken "a female profile, specifically, the profile of the domestic helper" (Tadiar 154) that has arguably reflect-

ed much of what has been researched about Filipino migration. Scholars emphasized how the continuous influx of domestic workers abroad has made the Filipina into the world's neoliberal servants (Parreñas, *Globalization* 26) who are not simply constituents but constituting the production of the nation (Tadiar 154). The mobility of this national and gendered identity is largely hastened/aggravated by the global care chains or the "personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring" (Hochschild 131). Rhacel Parreñas further describes this feminization of reproductive wage labor as "forging links among distinct systems of gender inequality" from both sending and receiving nations ("Reproductive Labor" 569). This relationship is founded on the international transfer of caretaking or the "three-tier transfer of reproductive labor", where class-privileged women from developed/industrial countries employ poor women from underdeveloped countries and, in turn, resort to hiring poorer rural women to do reproductive labor in their place ("Reproductive Labor" 561). Tadiar argues that global domestic work's gendered and racialized orientation turns them into "labor-commodities" or corporeal objects bought and sold by recruitment agencies for their gendered skill (155) as much as their presumed racial classed predisposition to global servitude. In as much as Filipina domestic workers are hailed for their remittance "heroism" that contributed to the PHP 211.9 billion accounted last 2019 from overseas Filipino workers (PSA), news stories and popular media representation about them continue to underscore the prevalent sexual, physical, and psychological abuses, and other forms of labor and human rights violations. Despite growing cases of abuse, Filipinas continue to "prefer" to work in these nations, such as in Hong Kong, where, in 2018, migrant domestic workers already contributed an estimated amount of 12.6 billion dollars to its economy, and 55 percent of these workers are Filipinos (Value of Care 4). In contrast to this, the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent physical and social restrictions and "lockdowns" in place in the city have tripled reports of sexual and physical abuse of foreign domestic workers, including 40,000 having been given zero rest days during the pandemic (Cheng "Hong Kong"). What Tadiar has described earlier in her research as a "second autopsy" done by media outfits on domestic workers' bodies, such as reducing them into headlines narrating various forms of violence that have rendered them "bodies without subjectivity" in the early 90s (155) still rings true today.

However, this has also overshadowed an otherwise politically agentic subjectivity, especially among activists of the Filipina domestic worker community in Hong Kong who engage in various forms of transnational activism (see, for example, Sim 2003; Constable 2009; Hsia 2009; Lai 2010; Wui and Delias 2015; Lim 2016). This is owed in part to Hong Kong's unique

postcolonial condition that, unlike other labor receiving nations, allows migrants to politically organize since their concerns are deemed inconsequential by locals while their labor remains essential to the economy of the region, turning it into an effective transnational state (Constable, "Migrant Workers" 162). Nicole Constable contrasts the themes of classed, racialized, and gendered enslavement in prior domestic labor research with her documentation of empowered Filipina domestic worker activists and their "many states of protests" that demonstrate the discursive capacity of women once they have crossed the threshold of the domestic space into the public space, proving that the "domestic transcends and transforms the public, political, transnational, and global" ("Migrant Workers" 161). This shows how they are active agents in shaping their narratives away from the suffering daughters and mothers often portrayed in popular media (Patterson 1012). These protests, along with other migrant activities, are staged in the public spaces of Hong Kong, most often done during their popular Sunday day off in Hong Kong's Central when Chater and other intersecting roads are closed to traffic. Nevertheless, this "freedom" is overshadowed by prevailing rules of their employment that are contractually limited to two years. Upon termination or expiration, they must leave within seven days unless they find another employer. However, while these scholars acknowledge the agency of Filipinas, these have also flattened an otherwise ethnically diverse identity of domestic workers from the Philippines.

This gap allowed me to focus my research on Indigenous Filipina women who are also sustaining their forms of migrant activism that crosses not just the boundaries of the domestic and public spheres but also into the online platforms made more accessible during these times of social and physical restrictions while asserting their unique indigeneity. This paper aims to expand in Hong Kong the limited research on the Igorot diaspora (see, for example, in New Zealand, Benito 2012; and in the United Kingdom, McKay 2002; 2010; 2016; Tindaan 2019; 2020), Igorot diasporic internet use and social media representation (see for example Longboan 2009; 2011; Botangen et al. 2017), and, most significantly, on their social media activism (see for example Soriano 2012). The following discussion outlines the interrelated conditions of the Filipina and Igorot domestic bodies, which are framed simultaneously by the abject logic of empire (Balce 181) and the commodified Filipina domestic identity (Tadiar 157).

## The Igorot-Domestic Body

According to William Henry Scott, the original meaning of the term Igorot or "people from the mountain chains" also reflect the dichotomous and colonial relations of the unchristianised natives of the north against the colonized indios of the lowlands (2). This colonial construct came from a series of failed Spanish expeditions to the Cordillera mountains due to a sustained Igorot resistance that thwarted any Spanish military settlement while the majority of the country was under Spanish rule for over three centuries. Fleeting and failed Spanish contact of Igorot territories also resulted in "othered" discourses of the Indigenous peoples as "savages," "cannibals," "pagans", among others, were evident in many friar accounts, military logs, and other colonial documents that lasted well beyond the turn of the century during the American occupation of the country (Aguilar-Cariño 194). This othering aggravated when the Americans successfully colonized Igorot territory and incorporated Indigenous peoples into their "administrative grid" (Finin 14). This has not just re-mapped ancestral territories and paved roads deeper into the hinterlands but packaged "complex historical and cultural realities neatly compartmentalized bureaucratic structures, thereby allowing for placement of arbitrary social and political boundaries" (Finin 14). One of these structures includes the institution of public education that took advantage of the "perfectibility" of the native subject (McKay, "Rethinking" 296). These forms of "benevolent assimilation" are coupled with the proliferation of photographs of Igorot and other Indigenous natives from the auspices of the Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes led by a former professor of zoology turned interior secretary, Dean Conant Worcester. These photographs often portrayed Indigenous subjects sitting or standing, sometimes with an American officer whose white and uniformed figure magnifies the "difference" of the native's naked body. In his tenure in office, Worcester produced photographs published widely and have arguably furthered the othering of the Igorot and formed many assumptions of "tribal" natives even after former colonial independence. These photographs have rendered the Igorot merely "examples, not as individuals" (Rice, "His Name" 74).

The Worcester archive served as the predominant visual representation and objectification of Indigenous subjects from which their bodies were portrayed in various "manipulations and misrepresentations" under the guise of "ethnological photography" (Rice, *Fantasy Islands* 39), subject to the colonial gaze that elicits "pleasures of empire" (Balce 178). These photographs archived "American imperialism's abject logic of reducing living beings to body part and bodies reproduced in popular culture to convey the messages of empire" (Balce 181)



The pleasures derived from this "shadow archive" (Balce 11) continue to influence contemporary exoticisms surrounding the Igorot body prevalent in Philippine media. However, Anilyn Salvador-Amores found that the otherwise colonial and othered representation of the Igorot from the Worcester archive can be made as tools to recuperate and (re)produce new meanings that can be gleaned from ethnographic fieldwork using photo-elicitation techniques. In this study, she argues that these photographs can be used to "recover, retell, and rediscover" (55) narrative aspects of culture from cultural practitioners where these photographs can be made as "conversation pieces" (55), triggering an orality that these visual objects bear. This has not just subverted the shadow archive's imperial messages but has extended the use of these photographs, as Salvador-Amores explains, from visual history to oral history (55). The "afterlives" of these photographs seem to hold twin archival significance, one from the colonial past of American imperialism that continues to overshadow and other Igorot identity into pleasurable, exoticized bodies and body parts and, on the other hand, has shown an archive of reinterpretation. This resurgent and reparative theme from the abject images of Igorot and other Indigenous peoples is also evident in the social media activism of the Igorot in the Philippines. Analyzing the websites of known Igorot organizations such as the Tebtebba and the CPA, Soriano describes their online spaces as "countering stereotypes about indigenous culture as dynamic and not static and of indigenous people as active and not passive actors in society" (40). Further, from the development to the design of these organizations' websites, Soriano (2012) notes that resistance can be made digital and creative.

### **Social Media Activism and the Igorot-Domestic**

I extend the notion of the Igorot body as it was abjected in the colonial archive and reclaimed in contemporary online and offline resistances to the body of the domestic Filipina described earlier as a "labor-commodity" (Tadiar 155). Interestingly, as the Filipina domestic became the nation's "prime" warm body export commodity, Tadiar also figures the Filipina body as the biogeographical territory of nations that feminized labor and where global "power struggles are staged" (170). For Igorot domestic workers, the "baggage" of their colonial othering and the resurgent potential these bear has also moved the struggle into the digital territories of social media activism, expanding and indigenizing the domestic biogeography. This has ushered the Igorot domestic into the "networked publics" defined thus:



Networked publics are publics that by restructured by networked technologies. As such, they are simultaneously (1) the space constructed through networked technologies and (2) the imagined collective that emerges as result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice. Networked publics serve many of the same functions as other types of publics they allow people to gather for social, cultural, and civic purposes, and they help people connect with a world beyond their close friends and family. (boyd 39)

boyd further articulates this by ascribing affordances that make the networked publics distinct such as persistence, replicability, scalability, and searchability. I focus my analyses on the conditions of replicability or the "reproducibility" of online content and scalability or "the potential visibility of content" (boyd 46). In a related study, Abidin provides a complementary framework for analyzing the networked publics in what she calls the "refracted publics" from strategies that fall "below the radar" (2). She further describes this as "vernacular cultures of circumvention strategies on social media in response to both analog and algorithmic vision and access... mobilized to avoid detection, promote deflection, and facilitate the dissemination of specific messages away from or toward target audiences" (10) Although primarily related to celebrity/Influencer culture, Abidin's study provides a counter analytic to understanding networked/refracted publics from subjects that arguably fall under the radar in social media research. Specifically, Abidin's conditions of "decodability" where content may not be intelligible despite being duplicated and "silosociability" where the "intended visibility of content is intensely communal and localized" (2) contrasts with the stability of boyd's presumed replicability and scalability. These provide a more textured understanding of Igorot-domestic social media discussed in the following sections.

### **Scalability and Silosociability: Expanding Spaces of Transgression**

Last September 13, 2020, the Hong Kong launch of #DefendCordilleraPH was staged online via Zoom, with members of various Igorot domestic worker organizations attending (see figure 1). This global campaign aims to raise awareness of the ongoing struggles of Igorot Indigenous peoples in the Philippines, such as multinational companies proposing/establishing "development" projects in resource-rich Igorot territories such as large-scale mining and mega-dams, the most recent of which is the proposed Alimit Hydropower Complex in Ifugao of SN Aboitiz Power Group whose permit is under review (Lagare "SNAP"). Extractive projects such as this threaten the predominantly agricultural live-

lihood of farmers in the Cordillera and often undermine Igorot notions of ancestral land and territory. Moreover, under the controversial Anti-Terror Law, the global campaign underscores the defense of "plunder and state terror." Coupled with these development projects is the struggle for ancestral land ownership against the country's "legal pluralism", of which pre-existing customary land tenure and other forms of communal ownership of the Igorot contradict state-defined forms of land ownership and titling (Prill-Brett, "Contested Domains" 182) despite "native title" already having judicial precedence in the country (Lynch 268).



Figure 1. #DefendCordilleraPH poster. Photo courtesy of Pinatud a Saleng ti Umili (PSU).

Due to the COVID19 pandemic, social restrictions and international travel bans in Hong Kong and the Philippines compelled many domestic workers, especially Igorot activists, to "relocate" their activities to digital platforms such as Zoom. However, this condition has enabled the expansion of both their "audience" and participants, increasing the potential scalability of their advocacy. Simultaneously broadcasting this on Facebook has also magnified the "reach" of the activity as it now can be "shared" extensively among networks of members, allies, and organizations, even those that might encounter this on their feed. Scalability is not just measured in the potential widening of this campaign through Facebook's platform but also in the "archival" function of the platform in which organizers can post this activity for later viewing. This has been especially helpful not just for those who could not attend the live event but to domestic workers who do not have Sunday off. Further, this highlights how domestic workers can manage their participation in "online" Sunday events, especially since they are only given one day a week for their rest days. While migrant leaders encourage their live attendance, some have chosen to attend the activity

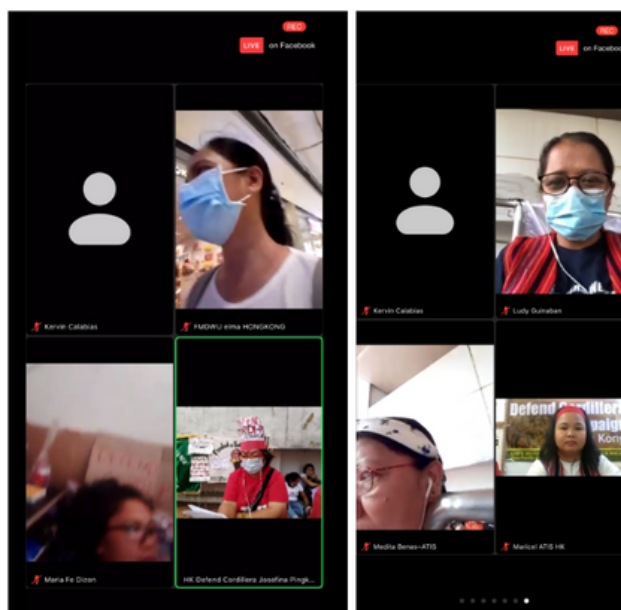


Figure 2. Zoom screen capture of #DefendCordilleraPH launch.

while working simultaneously. I later found out that domestic workers have now gained a sense of flexibility because so much of their activities are done online. As is shown in figure 2, some domestic workers are elsewhere or preoccupied. While this does not reflect the quality of their participation, digital platforms have given domestic workers ways to manage and navigate their restrictive contexts flexibly. The almost limitless reach and archival potential of this activity and similar events staged by Igorot migrants can also spread beyond both geographic and temporal limitations. In a way, these migrants have not just transgressed their temporal and contractual limitations but have also crossed/reached other global time zones, further expanding the scalability of their advocacy. The COVID19 pandemic has also clearly "redrawn" the spaces for domestic workers publics in Hong Kong. Previously occupying Chater Road since its closure to vehicular traffic in 1997, the dense presence of domestic workers and the staging of their activities on Sundays have now been relegated to the digital.

This migration to digital spaces has opened other ways of performing Igorot activism and its advocacies. As they advance the call to defend ancestral land, life, and resources in this event, Igorot domestic worker activists have also migrated a previously geographic concern of ancestral land rights into the digital topography. In a way, Igorot activism in Hong Kong also reshapes what land could potentially mean for Indigenous migrants caught in circular migration. Many of my initial interviews with these women reflect the impending reality of



Figure 3. Migrants pose for photo documentation.

their return despite the constant renewal of their domestic worker contracts. When asked about this seeming contradiction, most of them express how the return "for good" is always inevitable: "babalik at babalik ka pa rin" (you will always return) as manang Jocapi (not her real name), a domestic worker and activist in the city since 1996, told me. Repeating the Filipino word "babalik" (will return) emphasizes the perpetuity of the return home, albeit in the future tense. However, to Indigenous activists whose "future" home is contingent on the return of their ancestral land, the "futurity" of this statement also seems to evoke a certain kind of loss. The National Commission for Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), an independent government agency directly under the Office of the President, has been mandated since 1997 to facilitate the return of ancestral land by awarding certificates of ancestral land titles and/or domains to rightful persons and/or communities. The NCIP's process of authentication of ownership alongside pluralistic land laws (Prill-Brett, "Indigenous Land Rights" 687) has contravened native title applications and has also been vulnerable to dispossession (Theriault 115). Despite the uncertainty that surrounds ancestral land rights, Igorot activists continue to uphold their rights through meaningful protests and campaigns such as this. The effects of scalability in the digital topography of ancestral land rights have simultaneously widened its "defense" affective reach. They have relocated the discourse of ancestral land rights into different geographic, spatial, and temporal contexts of digital presence in the networked publics and its archiving in Zoom and Facebook. The migration of Igorot activism to the networked publics has shown the simultaneous spaces of the domestic and Indigenous, both real and advocated. This kind of "expanded" and "transgressive" presence and participation are brought about by their various "restrictive" circumstances; the COVID 19 pandemic, contracted domestic labor, and the struggle for ancestral land. Equally



Figure 4. *Members preparing for the global launch.*

transgressive and admirable are those that devote their time and participate actively in this event, sacrificing their soul rest day in a week to conduct "unrest" (see figure 3).

Since most of these women have only used Zoom for the first time, most needed assistance that fellow migrants have offered (see figure 4). This underscores how the scalability of networked publics relies on technological infrastructures as it is "supported" by social factors. These have also revealed an underlying system of support and solidarity among migrants that pre-exist and make their migration into networked publics more effective. I have also observed how activism helped migrants acquire technological skills, among others, that significantly improve not just their strategies of activism but can be made transferable to other contexts. As migrant activism enabled women to cross the threshold of domesticity into the political and global (Constable, "Migrant Workers" 161), it has also shaped and honed other skills against the "unskilled," "devalued," and "labor-intensive task" of domestic work that is falsely construed as inalienable from their feminine bodies (Tadiar 157). Earlier research highlights Igorot domestic workers who primarily come from a rural and agricultural background and in which migration has reshaped both their role as primary breadwinners and the "landscape" of their rural communities as they began to invest in their communities, such as putting up agribusiness stores and other economic ventures (McKay, "Cultivating" 288). Igorot domestic worker activists have potentially furthered this change by developing skills from activism in the networked publics that simultaneously transgress the "de-skilling" of domestic workers and increase and improve their technical, logistic, and "soft" skills. Thus, Igorot migrant activism has allowed the liberation of their bodies from other restrictions that rendered them docile subjects of global capitalism.





Figure 5. "Jota" poses for a selfie for campaign purposes.

1

Extending and expanding their activism often reveal other strategies of resourcefulness. In figure 5, Jocelyn Tanguid, the chairperson of the Cordillera Alliance – Hong Kong (CORALL), is taking a "selfie" dressed in traditional tapis (woven wraparound skirt) and blouse with Indigenous motifs against handwritten "posters" bearing slogans and campaign calls under the #DefendCordilleraPH, including the call to "junk" the Anti-Terror Law. This photograph was uploaded to the CORALL Facebook page as part of their sustaining the campaign after the launch. Interestingly, this "selfie" is that she took in her employer's house, which "visually" speaks of a temporal and spatial transgressivity that defies the many layers of their restrictive and contracted labor. By taking advantage of their employer's absence (or perhaps the permission granted to them), they have turned the domestic space into a platform for transgression. This space has otherwise confined them. This has also demonstrated how their ingenious use of space extends to maximize their limited resources by manually writing their slogans/posters, which is evident in many events where some have even been recycled, using the back of the paper for the next campaign. In this picture, she has also managed to extend the "Indigenous motif" by draping an Igorot tapestry onto what appears to be a rectangular board where she plastered the handwritten slogans for support. Albeit the resourcefulness and creativity that circumvents their limited resources in Hong Kong, this conversely illustrates a "temporariness" or provisional quality that magnifies their precarious labor conditions and their Indigenous culture and activism staging. These restrictions notwithstanding, domestic workers' movements have always been suspected and limited.

In this manner, a precarity overshadows these transgressive strategies. Abidin's (2021) refracted silosociability then undergirds and limits the presumed reach of these transgressive acts by revealing the underlying local and communal limitations surrounding their activism. Domestic work and activism are contingent on Hong Kong's precarious labor contracts and, more generally, global demand for contractual labor. Members are as active in their organizations in as much as the time, body, and spaces that continue to accommodate them. Moreover, issues on Indigenous land and identity are not as "viral" as this activism hopes to become. These people and their culture are as marginalized in Hong Kong and Philippine society as in their ancestral lands. Despite this refraction and the limitation of their mobility and resources, the agentic qualities of their activism represented/posted/shared and made "viral" in the networked public remain.



Figure 6. *Free Betty Belen* poster from the CPA.

### Replicability and Decodability: Reclaiming Igorot Identity and Strategic Self-Exoticism

A month after the launch, the arrest and detention of Betty Belen became part of the global campaign (see figure 6) that has, in turn, inspired Igorot domestic workers in Hong Kong to post their photos holding calls to free the peasant leader and reiterate that "activism is not terrorism" (see figures 7 and 8). These photographs illustrate how their once exoticized and othered bodies are "reappropriated" for political ends. Moreover, Igorot domestic workers have reframed the abject shadow archive into a collection of photographs that display, among others, Igorot resistance that, to a certain extent, echo to a precolonial defense of their ancestral lands and culture (see Figures 5, 7, and 8). The restaging of this primordial indigeneity in Hong Kong among Igorot women has also continued a tradition of using the





Figure 7 (left) and 8 (right). *Members of PSU and CORALL pose for campaign photographs. Photographs courtesy of PSU and CORALL.*

feminine body in staging resistance. During the 1970s, during the Martial Law rule of the dictator Ferdinand Marcos, Igorot peasant women from the village of Mainit in Bontoc organized themselves and confronted engineers from the mining company that intended to operate in their ancestral land, including the soldiers that accompanied them (Ngabit-Quitasol "Squeezed Men's") using their bodies. Led by Petra Macliing, a prominent peasant woman leader, women of the village trooped to the encampments and stripped naked where they dared soldiers "to harm the womb from where they came" (Ngabit-Quitasol "Squeezed Men's"). With their "naked defiance", the women chanted in their language: "Uray maid armas mi/ armas mi nan ima mi / estawes, esta-gawis/ ikmer mi snan fitfitli, fitfitlin na raraki/ estawes, esta-gawis!" (We may not be armed/ but our hands are our weapons/ We use our bare hands to squeeze balls, the balls of men.) (Ngabit-Quitasol "Squeezed Men's")

To a certain extent, Igorot domestic women activists replicate this defiance through their bodily transgressions. As they choose to subvert their domesticity through their activities and participation as activists, the posting of these photographs that show their bold and daring support despite the dangers of the Anti-Terror Law are also potentially replicated and are easily reproducible by other migrants who choose to support the campaign (see Figure 7 and 8). These efforts have centralized their bodies as points of transgression and subversion. However, more than this, Igorot women have strategically used the precedent of exotic fantasies surrounding their bodies as potent catalysts of resistance. By asserting their activism through the declaration of themselves as "defenders" of ancestral lands, identity, and resources against the threat of the Anti-Terror Law, they have made their bodies and the

simultaneously abject and empowered state it carries as counter-discourses to "state terrorism." However, these point to additional risk and precarity in their employment and in subjecting their bodies to the dangerous public space of social media.

However, the replicability of this activism in the networked publics hinges on the violent conditions surrounding Indigenous peoples and activists in the Philippines. Suppose the state continuously employs fascistic measures to quell dissent visual materials and representation of activism, and Indigenous people remain the incarcerated, disappeared, and/or murdered "defenders" of human rights and ancestral land. This reveals the violent underside of replicability and virality. As human rights conditions in the country continue to worsen, materials of activism posted in the networked publics rely on the almost genocidal nature of violence against Indigenous peoples to become "viral" materials. The potential virality then of these materials hinges on the violent relationship between terrorism and counter-terrorism that have contradicting narratives from Igorot activists and state forces. This virulence inherent in the "viral" reveals what Abidin describes as the fractured condition of "sentiment seeding" (7) or an affective precondition for "clickbait." Sentiment seeding "insidiously warm up and soften public reception to specific ideas, to shape and guide their slow, subtle, but stealthy acceptance of them" (7). Further, other than the stark unemployment in the country that forces Filipinas to migrate abroad for work, the militarization of their communities and cases such as Belen's only add to the pull of outmigration. In a way, these examples have shown how domestic labor migration is equally diminishing of Igorot population. What is left are those to be posted, alerted, or asked to be spread widely, such as Indigenous bodies killed, tortured, arrested, or disappeared. As the social network grows and the affective nodes of anger, frustration, support, sympathy, and even ridicule from "internet trolls" emanate from these visual materials, red-tagging becomes the affective trigger to departures/migration disappearances and abuse. The proliferation of these campaign posters and photographs/selfies of support and deviance are flourishing in an environment that turns these efforts into emotional "clickbaits" or, worse, as tolerated facts and conditions of being Indigenous in a time of "terrorism."

## Conclusion: Mediality and Pliancy

My preliminary examination of social media activism in select publication materials produced and distributed by Igorot organizations during the #DefendCordilleraPH campaign shows the networked and refracted publics from which Igorot migrant activism circulates. Igorot domestic worker activists have demonstrated the reclamation of their abject Indigenous bodies and the subversion of the gendered, racialized, and classed notions of domesticity through their unique staging of social media activism. I have highlighted qualities of scalability and silosociability as the dynamics that both expand and limit their activism despite being able to transgress the limitations of their contracted labor in the staging of online events. The expansion of their presence and participation and its flexibility in the networked publics also "relocated" the struggle for ancestral land rights into the digital topography of Igorot activism, where the scalability of advocacy brought the discourse of land into various and simultaneous geographic, spatial, and temporal contexts. The resourcefulness of space and material and their acquisition of technological skills were also demonstrated in their activism that also uses self-exoticism as a strategy to assert themselves and their campaigns that could potentially further the changing of their rural and digital landscapes. Nevertheless, as Igorot women centralize their bodies in asserting their activism and indigeneity, their online campaign's virality's underlying affective "virulence" is the almost genocidal condition of activism and Indigenous peoples in the Philippines, which is aggravated in the "clickbait" culture of social media.

In as much as the online publics are both networked and refracted, the Igorot-domestic has not yet wholly reaffirmed and reclaimed their bodies and identities subject to prevailing forces of global capitalism and Indigenous "othering" of issues on ancestral land and resources. However, the inherent mediality of social media has effectively intervened and placed itself as a relevant tool in accomplishing their tasks as activists and their social obligations as domestic workers. The "pliancy" of their bodies or the adaptability within confines of restrictions and the ability to "safely" navigate their conditions, online or offline, are keys to continuously reclaiming indigeneity and subverting domesticity. I partially conclude that "pliancy" or strategic flexibility of assertion and compliance and resistance and servitude can foster hope to shape a more stable future for all.

## Reference

- Abidin, Crystal. "From 'Networked Publics' to 'Refracted Publics': A Companion Framework for Researching 'Below the Radar' Studies." *Social Media + Society*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2021, 1-13. Sage, doi: 10.1177/2056305120984458.
- Aguilar-Cariño, Ma. Luisa. "The Igorot as Other: Four Discourses from the Colonial Period." *Philippine Studies: Historical & Ethnographic Studies*, vol. 42, no. 2, 1994, 194-209. *Philippine Studies*, <http://www.philippinestudies.net/ojs/index.php/ps/article/view/788/786>.
- Balce, Nerissa. *Body Parts of Empire: Visual Abjection, Filipino Images, and the American Archive*. University of Michigan Press, 2016.
- Beltran, Michael. "Battle Over Anti-Terror Law Opens at the Philippines' Top Court." *The Diplomat*, 4 February 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/02/battle-over-anti-terror-law-open-at-the-philippines-top-court/>.
- Benito, Myriam. *Leadership and Governance within the Igorot Diaspora*. University of Auckland Press, 2012.
- Botangen, Khavee Agustus, Shahper Vodanovich, and Jian Yu. "Preservation of Indigenous Culture Among Indigenous Migrants through Social Media: The Igorot Peoples." *Proceedings of the 50th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*. Hawaii, 2017.
- boyd, danah. "Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implication." In *A Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites*, edited by Zizi Papacharissi, Routledge, 2011.
- Buan, Lian. "Anti-Terror Law Violates 15 of 22 Items in Bill of Rights, Issue TRO Now." *Rappler*, 23 Feb 2021, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/petitioner-groups-anti-terrorism-law-violates-items-bill-of-rights-issue-tro-now>.
- Cheng, Selina. "Hong Kong Domestic Workers Faced Wave of Sex Attacks and Physical Abuse During Pandemic Lockdown." *Hong Kong Free Press* 29 June 2021. <https://hongkongfp.com/2021/06/29/hong-kong-domestic-workers-faced-wave-of-sex-attacks-and-physical-abuse-during-pandemic-lockdown/>.
- Constable, Nicole. "Migrant Workers and the Many States of Protest in Hong Kong." *Critical Asian Studies*, vol. 41, 2009, 143-164. Taylor and Francis, doi: 10.1080/14672710802631202
- . "Sexuality and Discipline among Filipina Domestic Workers in Hong Kong." *American Ethnologist*, vol. 24, no. 3, 1997, 539-558. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/647082>.
- Enrich Hong Kong. *The Value of Care: Key Contributions of Migrant Domestic Workers to Economic Growth and Family Well-being in Asia*. Experian Asia Pacific, 2018, [enrichhk.org/sites/default/files/2019-09/Final\\_The-Value-of-Care\\_Full-Report.pdf](http://enrichhk.org/sites/default/files/2019-09/Final_The-Value-of-Care_Full-Report.pdf).

## Reference

- Finin, Gerard. *The Making of the Igorot: Contours of Cordillera Consciousness*. Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2005.
- Gavilan, Jodesz. "Lives Endanger as Red-Tagging Intensifies." *Rappler*, 20 Feb 2020, <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/lives-in-danger-duterte-government-red-tagging-campaign>.
- Hochschild, Arlie. "Global Care Chains and Emotional Surplus Value." *On the Edge: Living with Global Capitalism*, edited by Will Hutton and Anthony Giddens. Jonathan Cape, 2000, 130–146.
- Hsia, Hsiao-Chuan. "The Making of a Transnational Grassroots Migrant Movement: A Case Study of Hong Kong's Asian Migrants' Coordinating Body." *Critical Asian Studies*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2009, 113-141. Taylor and Francis, doi: 10.1080/14672710802631186.
- Lagare, Jordeene. "SNAP Hits a Snag with Alimit Hydro Project." *The Manila Times*, 31 March 2021, <https://www.manilatimes.net/2021/03/31/business/companies/snap-hits-a-snag-with-alimit-hydro-project/857781>.
- Lai, Ming-yan. "Dancing to Different Tunes: Performance and Activism Among Migrant Domestic Workers in Hong Kong." *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 33, no. 5, 2010, 501-511. ScienceDirect, doi: 10.1016/j.wsif.2010.07.003.
- Lim, Adelyn. "Transnational Organising and Feminist Politics of Difference and Solidarity: The Mobilisation of Domestic Workers in Hong Kong." *Asian Studies Review*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2016, 70–88. Taylor and Francis, doi: 10.1080/10357823.2015.1124841.
- Longboan, Liezel. "E-gorots: Exploring Indigenous Identity in Translocal Spaces." *South East Asia Research*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2011, 319–341. Sage, doi: 10.5367/sear.2011.0042.
- . "Igorots in the Blogosphere: Claiming Spaces, Re-constructing Identities." *Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2009, 1-16. Cardiff University, doi: 10.31165/nk.2009.21.32.
- Lynch, Owen. "Native Title, Private Right and Tribal Land Law: An Introductory Survey." *Philippine Law Journal*, vol. 57, no. 2, 1982, 268-306.
- McKay, Deirdre. "A Transnational Pig: Reconstituting Kinship Among Filipinos in Hong Kong." *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 11, no. 3-4, 2010, 330–344. Taylor and Francis, doi: 10.1080/14442213.2010.513400.
- . *An Archipelago of Care*. Indiana University Press, 2016.
- . "Cultivating New Local Futures: Remittance Economies and Land-Use Patterns in Ifugao, Philippines." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 34, no.2, 2003, 285–306. Cambridge, doi: 10.1017/s0022463403000262.

## Reference

- . "Rethinking Indigenous Place: Igorot Identity and Locality in the Philippines." *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2006, 291-306. Wiley, doi: 10.1111/j.18359310.2006.tb00065.x.
- Ngabit-Quitasol, Kimberlie. "A Woman Who 'Squeezed Men's Balls' in Defense of Her Homeland." Kodao Productions, 31 May 2018, <https://kodao.org/a-woman-who-squeezed-mens-balls-in-defense-of-her-homeland/>.
- Parreñas, Rhacel Salazar. "Migrant Filipina Domestic Workers and the International Division of Reproductive Labor." *Gender and Society*, vol. 14, no. 4, 2000, 560-580. Taylor and Francis, doi: 0.4324/9780203724491-26.
- . *Servants of Globalization: Migrant and Domestic Work*. Stanford University Press, 2015.
- . "Transgressing the Nation-State: The Partial Citizenship and 'Imagines (Global) Community' of Migrant Filipina Domestic Workers." *Signs*, vol. 26, no. 4, 2001, 1129-1154. Springer, doi: 10.1057/9780230101821\_6.
- Patag, Kristine Joy. "Court Junks Anti-Terrorism Case vs 2 Aeta Farmers Among First Charged Under ATA." Philstar Global, 19 July 2021, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2021/07/19/2113583/court-junks-anti-terrorism-case-vs-2-aeta-farmers-among-first-charged-under-ata>.
- Patterson, Christopher. "Queer, Brown, Migrant: Documenting the Hong Kong 'Helper'." *Cultural Studies*, vol. 33, no. 6, 2019, 1008-1028. Taylor and Francis, doi: 10.1080/09502386.2019.1660695.
- Prill-Brett, June. "Contested Domains: The Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) and Legal Pluralism." *Tradition and Transformation: Studies on Cordillera Indigenous Culture*, edited by Delfin Tolentino, Jr. Cordillera Studies Center, 2015, 171-189.
- . "Indigenous Land Rights and Legal Pluralism among Philippine Highlanders." *Law & Society Review: Law and Society in Southeast Asia* vol. 28, no. 3, 1994, 687-698. JSTOR, doi: 10.2307/3054089.
- Rice, Mark. *Dean Worcester's Fantasy Islands: Photography, Film, and the Colonial Philippines*. University of Michigan Press, 2014.
- . "His Name was Don Francisco Muro: Reconstructing an Image of American Imperialism." *American Quarterly*, vol. 62, no. 1, 2010, 49-76. St. John Fisher College, doi: 10.1353/aq.0.0117.
- Salvador-Amores, Analyn. "Afterlives of Dean C. Worcester's Colonial Photographs: Visualizing Igorot Material Culture, From Archives to Anthropological Fieldwork in Northern Luzon." *Visual Anthropology*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2016, 54-80. Taylor and Francis, doi: 10.1080/08949468.2016.1108832.



## Reference

- Scott, William Henry. *The Discovery of the Igorots: Spanish Contacts with the Pagans of Northern Luzon*. New Day Publishers, 2006.
- See, Air Balagtas. "Rodrigo Duterte Is Using One of the World's Longest COVID-19 Lockdowns to Strengthen His Grip on the Philippines." *Time*, 15 March 2021, <https://time.com/5945616/covid-philippines-pandemic-lockdown/>.
- Sim, Amy. "Lesbianism among Indonesian Women Migrants in Hong Kong." *As Normal as Possible: Negotiating Sexuality and Gender in Mainland China and Hong Kong*, edited by Yau Ching. Hong Kong University Press, 2010, 37-50.
- Soriano, Cheryl Ruth. "The Arts of Indigenous Online Dissent: Negotiating Technology, Indigeneity, and Activism in the Cordillera." *Telematics and Informatics*, vol. 29, 2012, 33-44. ScienceDirect, doi: 10.1016/j.tele.2011.04.004.
- Tadiar, Neferti Xina M. "Domestic Bodies of the Philippines." *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1997, 153-191. JSTOR, doi: 10.1355/sj12-2b.
- Talabong, Rambo. "Red-Tagged Gabriela Official Arrested in Cordillera Town." *Rappler*, 26 October 2020, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/gabriela-official-beatrice-belen-arrested-cordillera-october-2020>.
- Theriault, Noah. "Unravelling the Strings Attached: Philippine Indigeneity in Law and Practice." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2019, 107-128. National University of Singapore, doi: 10.1017/S0022463419000018.
- Tindaan, Ruth M. "Recreating Igorot Identity in Diaspora." *South East Asia Research*, vol. 28, no. 4, 2020, 465-485. Taylor and Francis, doi: 10.1080/0967828X.2020.1858151.
- . *The Performance of Indigenous Identity in the Igorot Diaspora in the United Kingdom*. 2019. University of London, PhD dissertation. <https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.797316>.
- Wui, Ma. Glenda Lopez and Dina Delias. "Examining the struggles for domestic workers: Hong Kong and the Philippines as interacting sites of activism." *Philippine Political Science Journal*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2015, 190-208. Taylor and Francis, doi: 10.1080/01154451.2015.1085677.