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Et Isgeng Takos nan Sagradoy Luta ay Naey
(Let Us Tread Mindfully and Live Forever on This Sacred Soil)

Malaya Caligtan-Tran

Growing up on Oʻahu I saw the military everywhere from local mall advertisements to hearing military jets flying overhead almost daily. For many low-income people of color the military is seen as a chance to gain socioeconomic mobility and safety. Relationships with repressive state apparatuses like the military and the police have become normalized in many families of color as an acceptable, even desirable career path especially when these positions offer job security and significant benefits like health insurance and free college. Not only does the U. S. military actively recruit BIPOC to serve in oppressing other BIPOC people but it also actively desecrates and pollutes native land across the world.

As an Igorot, my own family's history has been heavily impacted by the U. S. military, in some ways more obvious than others. For my grandfather, joining the U. S. military was seen as a pathway to better opportunity, something he thought would be inaccessible if he stayed in the Philippines. Through his Navy service he was able to access U. S. citizenship, education, and health care. My great-grandmother was born at Camp John Hay, (established in the early 1900s as the United States military summer capital in the Philippines) and my great-grandfather fought against the Japanese while in Tadian alongside the U. S. military during World War II. These are the more obvious ways in which the military has been ingrained into my family's life. Perhaps less obvious is the influence the U. S. military and colonization played in creating the economic conditions that forced my grandfather and many others to seek work elsewhere.

For many Igorots there were feelings of indebtedness to the United States for their role in "liberating" the Philippines. I share this because in the summer of 2019 along with a delegation of other Igorots we had planned to offer hoʻokupu on Maunakea. Initially, we had young Igorot men with us who were going to play gangsa; they had played since childhood. Oftentimes gangsa was played by men whereas women danced. Traditionally men played the gangsa because it was a way to ritually cleanse the men before and after taking a head in battle. As time went on and headhunting became less common, gangsa were played more at community gatherings and celebrations.

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Men have primarily continued to play gangsa but there has been an increase in women playing. Two days before we flew to Hawai'i Island to offer hoʻokupu one of the young men dropped out. His older brother came to drop off his family's gangsa and explained that his younger brother was in the process of being recruited for the military and due to the rigor of the background check he could not afford to potentially be caught on camera protesting. Reflecting on why this young man felt like he had to drop out, the conversation with his older brother revealed an overwhelming sense of indebtedness to the U. S. military. Before I delve into a brief history of Filipino and Igorot indebtedness to the United States, I would like to clarify what I mean when I refer to "Igorot '' as an identifier.

Brief History

Igorot has come to refer to the Indigenous ethnolinguistic groups of people who reside in the Cordillera Administrative Region in Northern Luzon. Currently, the Cordillera is divided into six adjacent provinces Abra, Benguet, Ifugao, Kalinga, Apayao, and Mountain Province. Within the region there is limited linguistic homogeneity, Ilokano is most often used to communicate across regions to navigate the wide range of languages and dialects. Historically, there has been significant variation in not only language but governance, trade, architecture, and dress (Finin 2005). The term Igorot itself can be traced to mean "mountaineer" in Tagalog and was used in Spanish records. However, the more intensely racialized use of the term coincides with American colonization and the derogatory connotation. In the larger imaginary of the Philippines, Igorots have historically been racialized as the savage "other" by Filipinos to solidify the identity of a civilized and developed Filipino.[1] A similar marker of division has been deployed between lowland and highland Filipinos, which corresponds closely with Christianized/non-Christianized and civilized/savage dichotomies. As a result, there is a complicated history of the use of Igorot as a slur and to connote an inability to modernize. This plays a part in the hesitancy of many from the Cordillera region to identify with Igorot. There is also a desire on the part of many Igorots to be a part of the larger political ecosystem of the Philippines that they have historically been excluded from due to racism.

The conceptualization of pan-Igorot identity seen today has been shaped by conditions of resistance to Marcos' development aggression in the 1970s and 1980s.[2] During his dictatorship, he

1. Aguilar, Filomeno V. "Tracing Origins: Ilustrado Nationalism and the Racial Science of Migration Waves." *The Journal o/ Asian Studies* 64, no. 3 (2005): 605-37. https://doi.org/10.1017/S002191180500152X.
2. Roderick N. Labrador, "Subordination and Resistances: Ethnicity in the Highland Communities of the Cordillera Administrative Region, Northern Luzon, Philippines," *Exploration in Southeast Asian Studies* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 15.

proposed to build the Chico River Dam as a way to "develop" the region; the proposed dam would displace those both in Bontoc and Kalinga through flooding. In resistance to this construction, through the formation of bodongs or peace pacts, those in Kalinga and Bontoc united in resistance to these development projects. Further development aggression has plagued the region as the Philippine nation-state and multinational corporations push to "develop" the region. Igorot has served as a political unifier in resistance to these pushes for modernization and development. Furthermore, Igorots have learned to navigate using the identifier to push back against the Filipino imaginary as well as solidify claims to Ancestral Domain. However, even with the formation of a pan-Igorot/pan-Cordillera identity, people still prefer to identify by specific regional identities such as Kankana-ey or Ibaloi.[3]

In diaspora, Igorots navigate this political, cultural, and social context beyond the geographical boundaries of the Cordillera, as diasporic Igorots take part in cultural events, online identity groups, and care labor in other countries.[4] They take part in the Philippines' export of OFWs (overseas Filipino workers) giving them an increasingly global network of politicization, labor, and socialization. Organizations such as BIBAK or BIMAK and Igorot Global Organization (IGO) have extended to include the global diaspora. BIBAK started as a student organization in Baguio representing the five distinct tribes: Benguet, Ifugao, Bontoc or Mountain Province, Apayao, and Kalinga. As Igorots migrated, BIBAK expanded globally as well as the Igorot Global Organization (IGO) (Finin 2005). These organizations became central to developing the diasporic Igorot community; Igorots could gather and take part in similar cultural practices and unite over shared experiences that were distinct from other Filipinos. In some cases, these organizations also served as a space where Igorots mobilized around political issues in the Cordillera.

Igorot identity is dynamic. In her work on Igorot translocality, McKay highlights the ways in which Igorot identity has extended to diasporic kin and the ways "virtual villages" have become part of a network of relationships. She explains how Igorot NGO workers take their international experiences with Indigenous communities globally and extend these learnings to develop fourth world solidarity (McKay 2006). Critically, McKay's work extends Igorot relationality beyond spatial boundaries set up by the nation-state; Igorot identity exists within histories of racism and colonialism but continues to negotiate and push past bounded categories of Igorot.

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3. Kankana-ey can also be spelled Kankanaey.
4. Tindaan, Ruth Molitas. "Recreating Igorot Identity in Diaspora." South East Asia Research 28, no. 4 (October 1, 2020): 465-85. https://doi.org/10.1080/0967828X.2020.1858151. Longboan, Liezel. "E-Gorots: Exploring Indigenous Identity in Translocal Spaces." South East Asia Research 19 (June 1, 2011): 319-41. https://doi.org/10.5367/sear.2011.0042.

Due to the colonization of the Philippines by the Spanish and later the Americans, portions of Filipino and Igorot history follow similar contours. American imposition of the English language and American history alongside the integration of Filipinos into the U. S. military played a critical role in shaping Filipino loyalty to the United States. For many Igorots and Filipinos, the United States represented a meritocratic chance to achieve a version of the American Dream that had become uniquely their own. Notions of success in the United States were shaped not only by English language and American history lessons but also the material realities of a failed post-revolutionary Philippines that seemed to provide plenty of degrees with few job opportunities and meager salaries. Citizenship, the vehicle for realizing these dreams was promised through military participation but was not equally delivered to all Filipinos.

Despite this, some Filipinos and Igorots alike have a sense of debt to the United States. E San Juan in his 1998 book *From Exile to Diaspora* establishes that there are "30,000 Filipinos serving in the U. S. Navy, a number exceeding the total manpower of the Philippine Navy itself" (San Juan 1998, 2). Setsu Shigematsu and Keith Camacho outline this sense of debt in the introduction of *Militarized Currents*. They explain how "The imperial myths of liberation create what Yoneyama calls an 'already accrued debt'" to the United States, which continues to fashion the United States as a 'liberator' of Japanese colonialism rather than a nation of war crimes associated with colonial takeovers and occupations" (Shigematsu and Camacho 2010, xxi). This debt plays a large role in many postcolonial subjects such as Filipinos, Micronesians, and Chamoru choosing to serve in the U. S. military. For many of these nations, despite a history of extended service, citizenship remains elusive (*Island Soldier*). The United States continues to occupy the position of "liberator" within the larger Filipino imaginary creating a sense of debt for many Igorots and Filipinos. The Visiting Force Agreement also plays a role in shaping the United States as a continued valiant protector of the Philippines. Understanding the ways in which the United States operates as both "protector" and "liberator" is important to unsettle these dynamics.

I turn to Indigenous futurities and back to my experiences on Maunakea to examine how these notions of debt need not bind us, as Igorots, as Indigenous people together.

Indigenous Futurities on Maunakea

> *Apo mi'y Kānaka Maoli ay nin demahdemang!* (Oh, Great Ancestors of Kānaka Maoli looking over us)
> *Tamaken yoy wasdin mi tinmatakdegang, isna ay lutan di Mauna Kea* (Hold us all firmly together where we stand, here at Mauna Kea)
> *Sik-a ay bilig mi, sakbobowam dakami* (You, our mountain,

protect and shelter us)
Ta nan ngawi ay umali, piktiwem dakapay ngoposen (You dissolve all that comes to lead us astray)
Pinading di Mauna Kea ay bilig (Ancestral Spirits of Mauna Kea)
Ya pinading di baybay (And ancestral spirits of our oceans)
Ay sinumgeng (Who are eternal)

Et isgeng takos nan sagradoy luta ay naey (Let us tread mindfully and live forever on this sacred soil)
Danum id Mauna Kea ay men lam-nin (Peaceful waters (of Lake Waiau) on Mauna Kea) *Et men lam-nin tako ay Kānaka Maoli* (Let us all in this Kānaka Maoli community, persist and thrive in peace).

The summer of 2019 offered me an opportunity to critically reflect on the positionality of Igorots in Hawai'i and the complicated ways in which Igorots navigate indigeneity in diaspora. This experience expanded my understanding of Indigenous relationality across colonial boundaries and nation-states. The offering of ho'okupu presented an opportunity to mutually recognize each other's sovereignty as Indigenous people outside of settler colonial structures of erasure and replacement. I turn to Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua's work in *Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education*, her chapter titled "Indigenous Futures Challenging Settler Colonialisms and Militarization" provides a generative framework to think through Igorot futurities in the context of offering ho'okupu on Maunakea. She explains that Indigenous futurities are "enactments of radical relationalities that transcend settler geographies and maps, temporalities and calendars, and/or settler measures of time and space" (Goodyear-Ka'ōpua 2018, 86).

If the normalization of militarization is to be unsettled, a radical future that centers on Indigenous resurgence is necessary. Goodyear-Ka'ōpua further explains "the personal and familial are political spaces that must be central to decolonizing and healing processes. The commonality is in calling Indigenous communities, families and individuals to build ourselves up from within, even while acts of resurgence will look different as they emerge within the diverse contexts and self-conscious traditions of various Indigenous nations and communities" (Goodyear-Ka'ōpua 2018, 88). Rather than serving as proxies for the state through military service and rather than occupying Hawai'i as a force that perpetuates settler colonialism. I hope Igorots can turn to Indigenous resurgence to recenter relationalities that allow us to exist outside of imperialist capitalist debt. I offer snippets of my experience as an Igorot on Maunakea as a way of both dreaming and enacting a future that transcends forms of relationality that are bounded by settler conceptions of space/time.

Freezing, sweaty hands gripping cordage—the wooden handle, shaped like a woman's body had been broken in half leaving only the

bottom half of the breasts, digging into my hands—the weight of the gong hurting my wrist. (It was clear I didn't grow up learning how to play the gongs by how tightly I gripped them—I was always the dancer.) The chant a Sagada elder wrote for Maunakea played through the speaker upon our entrance. The explanation of the chant ended, and we began to play. *Tuk . . . tuk . . . tuk . . . tuk. . . .* This was the first time I had played gangsa as an offering of intercultural solidarity and performance, in addition to being the first time I had offered a song and dance from my own culture. Being able to offer hoʻokupu as someone other than a haumana in a hula halau, was a powerful moment for me. I felt, at that moment, an incredible feeling of being seen and re-read with more nuance and respect.

The dance we performed was balangbang—traditionally performed as a war dance, over time this has become a community dance that is performed for cañaos and weddings. This performance was a way to share a long-standing practice from the Cordillera as an offering. Dance as a form of ceremony, offered in respect of land, people, and lifeways denies settler colonial conceptions of land relations. Offering hoʻokupu at Maunakea was a way to recognize relations that decenter extraction and recenter reciprocity. A way of recognizing relations and responsibility to both the land and to each other. The speech given in the beginning by one of our delegation members explained similar struggles to protect land, water, and life occurring at the same time in the Cordillera. This was a way for us to weave solidarity and build mutual recognition.

Some elements were not "traditional," such as the gangsa players primarily being women, the chant being recorded, and not inviting others to join us in our dance. However, as explained by Salvador-Amores, "tradition is not to be constructed as a static entity, but as a 'process' that involves assimilating new ideas and reviving old customs" (2011). By still choosing to perform and introduce ourselves as Igorot it was a way for us to challenge traditional understandings of what it means to be Igorot. This performance was a way to acknowledge tradition from our "homeland" but also a way to acknowledge Hawaiʻi, which has shaped our understanding of indigeneity. Our performance and offering on Maunakea was a way to practice reciprocity; we offered chanting, food, music, and dancing. We were actively both being and becoming Igorot. As we were performing, for me, it felt like an opportunity to—as authentically as we could—share our culture. It allowed us to share the dances and gong beats many of us, myself included, grew up with. As Kānaka Maoli were asserting their identity through their struggle, we were asserting our Igorot identity alongside them in solidarity. I was able to understand through this performance that being Igorot meant not only the expression of culture but how we aligned ourselves politically. Through this experience, I've come to understand the same holds true for myself as an Igorot. If we choose to call ourselves Igorot we must politicize and raise the voices of the struggles occurring in the homeland. We also have a responsibility to

support and raise the struggles of the Indigenous peoples of the places we have decided to call home. Interwoven with the dances, chant, and food we offered who we are as Indigenous people—our love and care for the land, culture, and history.