

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Indigenous culture and hybrid identity in
the Igorot transnational diaspora: A critical
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Abstract

Limited studies on identity negotiation through the lens of cultural sustainability in transnational contexts highlight the absence of a context-sensitive theoretical model on hybrid identity. We critically examine the processes of preserving indigenous knowledge, systems, and practices among Igorot-Americans in the North American transnational diaspora, and how such processes influence the construction of hybrid identities. In investigating these complex, mutual practices that span both the home and culturally bound communal circles, we also theorize identity reconstruction and offer new insights that contribute to knowledge in the social sciences. We adopt a combination of positivist, critical, and interpretive epistemological orientations to our findings obtained through a survey questionnaire, virtual interviews, and focus group discussions. Our findings present novel discourse on identity reconstruction and deviate from traditional paradigms within diasporic contexts. Thus, we contribute to expanding scholarly dialogue on theorizing Indigenous practices in Western contexts, while also offering a perspective on cultural identity in relation to cultural hegemony.

Keywords: Indigenous culture; Transnational diaspora; Hybrid identity; Cultural preservation; Critical theory

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1. Introduction

The Philippines is home to an estimated 14 – 17 million Indigenous peoples (IPs), who belong to over 110 ethnolinguistic groups (UNDP, 2013). The National Commission on Indigenous Peoples, the government agency tasked with protecting the welfare and rights of these groups, defines IPs as “a group of people or homogenous societies who have continuously lived as an organized community on communally bounded and defined territory” (RA 8371, 1997). Conventionally, IPs are identified by their descent from populations that inhabited the Philippines before colonization or the arrival of non-Indigenous religions and cultures. However, the United Nation-system body has developed a modern understanding of this term, based on a set of parameters that include, among others, self-identification as indigenous at the individual level and recognition by the community as their member, as well as a commitment to maintaining and reproducing

their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities (UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, n.d.). These parameters underpin the continuing desire of IPs to preserve their culture within complex social and political ecosystems. The IPs of the Philippines are largely concentrated in Northern Luzon, particularly in the Cordillera Administrative Region, which is home to 33% of the country's IP population. Collectively, these groups are known as the Igorots. June Prill-Brett, a prominent Cordillera-based anthropologist, suggests that the term "Igorot" may have derived from the Ilocano word "*gerret*," meaning "to cut off or slice," which is linked to the region's historical practices of headhunting (Longboan, 2009). Despite the passage of time, Igorot communities continue to experience stigma from mainstream Filipino society, especially concerning their physical appearance, traditional practices, and cultural heritage.

The geographical and historical contexts of the Igorot people – distinct from those of other Filipino groups – provided a unique lens for this study. The Igorot diaspora's experience of identity reconstruction in the West contrasts with that of their Filipino counterparts, particularly in navigating stereotypes and cultural differences. Historically, Igorots have been subjected to internalized dominance (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). In the Philippines, dominant groups reinforce social and cultural power dynamics that perpetuate the stigmatization of ethnic minorities (Lopez, 2019). In the international scene, the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, an anthropological exhibit featuring groups from the Philippines and the Arctic, reinforced the stigmatization of Igorots. The group was displayed in a "human exhibit" to represent "primitive" life in the Philippines. This event, along with other forms of racialization, contributed to the creation of enduring stereotypes about the Igorot people (Clevenger, 2000). Supremacist labels such as "savage," "primitive," and "barbaric" became deeply embedded in both Western and Filipino perceptions of Igorot identity. Although the stigmatization of Igorots may have evolved over time due to migration and changing identities in the diaspora, documenting their experiences in Western contexts provides a novel perspective on their ongoing identity negotiations, thus the motivation for this article. Over the past 50 years, IPs from the Cordillera region have increasingly engaged in global migration, particularly to countries such as the United States (US), the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, in pursuit of better economic opportunities (Benito, 2012). Many Igorots work in a range of white-collar professions, including nursing, physical therapy, and pharmacy (Bacdayan, 2011; Tindaan, 2019). This migration trend, driven primarily by economic factors, has been documented as a form of transnational diaspora

(Georgiou, 2010; IOM, 2019; OECD, 2018), but remains underexplored in the literature. While some studies have examined the economic and social aspects of Igorot migration (Longboan, 2011; McKay, 2006; 2016), there is still limited research on the cultural processes at play, particularly regarding identity formation and preservation and maintenance of Indigenous culture in the diaspora (Landzelius, 2006; Watson, 2010).

Empirical research specifically examining the relationships between Igorot migrants and cultural practices in the diaspora remains limited. For instance, the studies of Benito (2012) and Longboan (2011) explored how Igorot leaders preserve their culture abroad and how Igorots engage in identity negotiations through online platforms. However, few have examined how these practices influence the identity formation of Igorot-Americans, referring to a group of Igorots who migrated to the US and are considered American citizens, including their children. Meanwhile, previous studies on the Igorot diaspora have primarily focused on socioeconomic aspects, particularly the responsibilities of Igorots toward their families and communities (Weygan, 2009). Indigenous migrants face the dual challenge of assimilating into dominant Western cultures while maintaining their own traditions and cultural practices. This negotiation can result in a hybrid identity shaped by both Indigenous heritage and the influence of the host culture.

Given these gaps in the literature, we aim to explore how Igorot migrants in the US and Canada navigate the complexities of cultural preservation and identity reconstruction in the diaspora. More broadly, we examine how these transnational experiences contribute to the formation of hybrid identities among first-generation Igorot-Americans, who find themselves at the intersection of conflicting cultural paradigms. By focusing on this intersection, we offer new insights into how Indigenous cultural practices are maintained and adapted in postcolonial, transnational contexts. Specifically, we seek to answer the following research questions: (i) What is the extent of culturally rooted and ethnicity-based activities practiced among Igorot-Americans in the US diaspora? (ii) Is there a significant difference in the extent of practice of these activities based on marital status, ethnic affiliation, and length of stay in the US? (iii) How do Igorot-Americans sustain their Indigenous practices within family and communal spheres? and (iv) How do they (re)construct their identities in the diaspora?

We ground this study in the critical tenets of three interrelated theories that underpin our examination of cultural preservation and identity reconstruction among Igorot-Americans.

The Cultural Identity Theory (Collier & Thomas, 1988) addresses how individuals use communicative processes to construct and negotiate their cultural group identities and relationships in particular contexts. It also outlines properties that characterize how groups of people form identities relative to their social and cultural circumstances. We focus on one essential dimension of the Cultural Identity Theory – individual, relational, and communal identity (Collier & Thomas, 1988; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007) – to examine how Igorot-Americans use cultural memberships and relationships to sustain community and simultaneously form their identities.

The politics of Hybrid Identity (Hein, 2006; Wagner, 2016) is a socio-cultural concept that has gained positive significance in the postmodern period due to its use in qualitative inquiry across various disciplines in the social sciences, humanities, and education. In the context of identity studies, hybridity refers to a construct that defines the identity construction processes of individuals who simultaneously navigate multiple cultural reference systems, such as migrants (Brinkmann & Uslucan, 2013, p. 90). Following this line, identity reconstruction can be situated within the four typical models (Wagner, 2009). We focus on the fourth model – the cosmopolitan – which represents a modified version of the “hybrid” model, as individuals who embrace this framework are concerned with a “feeling of responsibility and respect for all people, irrespective of their cultural particularities” (Appiah, 2007, p. 12). For “cosmopolitans,” the core of personality is the individual identity, capable of accepting changes and avoiding prejudice.

Finally, the concept of “transnational diaspora and identity” centers on the dynamics of identity reconstruction in diasporic spaces. Diasporic populations, especially those living in specific locales – urban places, in particular – as well as in national and transnational spaces, “break off the specificities and singularities of place and expand their potentials for communication and community” (Giddens, 1990, p. 35). These conceptions of identity construction in the transnational diaspora also relate to the notion of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1973), which recognizes how the dominant culture in society is transmitted to the new generation through socialization or the process through which individuals internalize the cultures of their institutions (Bourdieu, 1973).

These three theories intersect, share common paradigms, and mutually undergird the researchers’ assumption that the transnational diaspora and global migration have accelerated the reconstruction of identity among immigrants. We aim for a critical, in-depth examination of the natural tension brought about by the conflicting interests espoused by cultural differences

negotiated by immigrants, given the persistent operation of broad, social concepts like “Othering” (Spivak, 1985) and “orientalism” (Said, 1978), Western hegemony, and all the -isms in sociocultural research, for example, racism and classism, among others.

The study’s conceptual paradigm is visually represented in Figure 1.

2. Data and methods

2.1. Design and context

We employed a mixed-methods approach, particularly the parallel design, guided by both constructivist and positivist perspectives, with a particular emphasis on grounded theory. While we sought to identify probabilistic causes (Humphreys, 1989) underlying the experiences of Igorot-Americans in the diaspora, we also adopted an interpretive approach to highlight the diverse perspectives and experiences of the participants. We collected data simultaneously and integrated the findings, with both methods being equally weighted.

The study participants in the quantitative aspect of the study were 46 Igorot-Americans, all of whom are affiliated with BIBAK (Bontoc/Mountain Province, Ifugao, Benguet, Apayao, and Kalinga), a network of Igorot community organizations across the US. Thirty-five percentages are affiliated with the Northeast chapter; 20% with the New England chapter; 18% with the Atlantic chapter; 13% with the Midwest region; 9% with the California chapter; and 5% with the Florida Igorot Society. In terms of ethnolinguistic affiliation, 37% belong to the Applai and Kankanaey tribes of Mountain Province; 20% each belong to the Bontoc tribe and the Kankanaey tribe of Benguet; 15% to the Ibaloi tribe of Benguet; and 4% each to the Ifugao and Kalinga tribes. Regarding marital status, the majority (74%) of respondents are married to a fellow Igorot; 14% to a fellow Filipino or non-Igorot; and 12% to individuals of foreign nationalities (e.g., American, Canadian, and Japanese). In terms of length of stay in the US, 78% of respondents have been residing in the US for 15 years or more, 15% for 6 – 14 years, and 7% for 5 years or less.

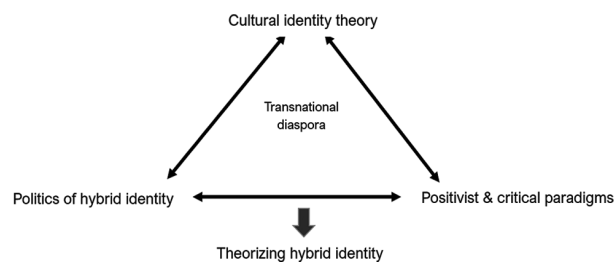


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the present study

The qualitative aspect of the study includes nine purposefully selected participants who participated in virtual interviews and focus group discussions (FDGs). The following inclusion criteria were used: (i) membership in any of the ethnolinguistic groups from the Cordillera region, (ii) permanent residency in the US or Canada for at least 10 years, and (iii) having first-generation Igorot-American children born and raised in the US.

2.2. Data source

To gather quantitative data, we developed and validated a researcher-designed survey, distributed through Google Forms. The developed survey was supplemented by an extensive review of existing literature on the cultural practices and knowledge of Igorots globally, particularly those practices observed as tools of cultural preservation among their children in familial and communal contexts. We provided the link to the presidents of BIBAK organizations, who then shared it with their members. All respondents completed the survey questionnaires through Google Forms.

We employed virtual one-on-one interviews with the nine purposefully selected participants. Each virtual interview lasted about 45 min to 1 h and was recorded using the Zoom application. Two virtual FDGs were conducted with the participants. The first FDG, which lasted about an hour and 40 min, aimed to collect additional data. Meanwhile, the second FDG was conducted for member-checking to validate the initial themes that emerged from the first phase of data analysis. During these data collection stages, we code-switched between English and various languages, which cultivated a certain level of trust and inclusivity. We also conducted subsequent correspondence with the organization's presidents to clarify additional emergent themes from the data.

In addition, we compiled social media posts from participants (e.g., from Facebook groups such as BIBAK-New England and Florida Igorots Society), which served as additional qualitative data. These posts, often reflecting the participants' experiences and perspectives, were analyzed as part of the broader data collection strategy.

2.3. Data analysis

We analyzed the quantitative data using descriptive and inferential statistics, including mean, standard deviation, and the *F*-test, to identify patterns and relationships among key variables, which include ethnolinguistic affiliation, marital status, and length of stay in the US. For the qualitative data, we employed constructivist grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) as our primary analytical framework. The analysis involved multiple stages of coding,

starting with open coding through an inductive approach, followed by focused coding, and ultimately axial coding. This process enabled us to identify relationships among the categories that emerged during focused coding. We also used the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1998), regularly revisiting raw data to compare axial codes and refine categories. Finally, we applied theoretical coding to integrate these categories into broader theoretical concepts that inform the development of a theoretical model as an output of the study.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings, we employed data triangulation by utilizing multiple methods of data collection – interviews, FDGs, and content analysis of social media posts (Creswell, 2013). We also integrated the quantitative findings with the qualitative data to strengthen the development of a cohesive theory that reflects the participants' lived experiences of cultural preservation and identity reconstruction in the diaspora.

In addition, we used collaborative data analysis as a key strategy to enhance the reliability of our findings. We compared and reconciled our respective analyses, which facilitated a deeper understanding of the data and helped resolve any discrepancies. Finally, we employed respondent validation during the virtual FDGs, allowing participants to verify and offer feedback on the accuracy and interpretation of the findings.

3. Results

The first section presents the extent of the practice of culturally rooted and ethnicity-based activities among Igorot-Americans as a means of sustaining and preserving Indigenous practices in the US diaspora.

3.1. Sustained Indigenous practices in the diaspora

Overall, findings show that the extent of the practice of indigenous cultural traditions among Igorot-Americans in the US diaspora is "sometimes practiced," as reflected by the grand weighted mean of 2.93. This generally indicates that while Igorot-Americans continue to observe the identified customs and traditions in the US, these are not practiced to a great extent. Table 1 presents the extent of practice of culturally rooted and ethnicity-based activities of Igorot-Americans in the US diaspora.

Key cultural practices surveyed include the enactment of Igorot values, the adoption of traditional rituals on special occasions, the spontaneous transmission of cultural practices such as thanksgiving rituals and chant recitation, and the use of both material culture (e.g., "*tapis*," "*wanes*") and non-material culture (e.g., heritage languages). These practices reflect an ongoing commitment to preserving Indigenous identity in the diaspora.

Table 1. Extent of practice of culturally rooted and ethnicity-based activities of Igorot-Americans in the United States (US) diaspora

Indigenous knowledge and practices	Mean	STD	Descriptive equivalent
1. Enactment of Igorot values like strong ties, family-orientedness, communalism, and culturalism, expressed through playing gongs, other Indigenous instruments, and performing various Igorot dances	3.39	0.94	Much practiced
2. Adoption of the “ <i>watwat</i> ” style, from pig butchering to meat distribution, as part of community gatherings and their counterparts in other Cordilleran provinces	2.17	1.07	Sometimes practiced
3. Engagement in <i>og-ogfo/ob-obbo</i> or “community teamwork and solidarity” (e.g., civic and social projects on education, health, and culture for individuals or organizations in the US/Canada and the Philippines)	3.35	0.88	Much practiced
4. Use of informal conversations or story-telling, (e.g., “ <i>bagbaga</i> ,” “ <i>isistorya</i> ,” “ <i>ug-ugud</i> ”) that center on Indigenous practices, beliefs, knowledge, and everyday experiences in work, life, and society	3.30	0.82	Much practiced
5. Spontaneous transmission of cultural practices, such as teaching boys to play gongs, and girls to perform traditional dances, and instructing proper wearing of traditional attire (e.g., “ <i>tapis</i> ,” “ <i>wanes</i> ,” “ <i>wakes</i> ”) during special occasions	3.13	0.92	Much practiced
6. Practice of traditional thanksgiving rituals, including vernacular prayers and chants (“ <i>bayya-o</i> ,” “ <i>ayyeng</i> ”)	2.96	1.15	Sometimes practiced
7. Enactment of spiritual Igorot values through food offerings to “ <i>anitos</i> ” or “ <i>atang</i> ,” respect for elders in various life situations, and observance of practices like “ <i>inayan</i> ,” “ <i>lawa</i> ,” and “ <i>madi</i> ,” among others	2.78	1.04	Sometimes practiced
8. Participation in Indigenous games like “ <i>sangkor/sanggal</i> ” (arm/fist wrestling), “ <i>kadang-kadang</i> ” relays, and traditional tug-of-war	2.74	0.86	Sometimes practiced
9. Use of ethnic or heritage language/s as part of teaching children to learn to speak (e.g., speaking to them in the vernacular and encouraging reciprocal use)	2.87	0.87	Sometimes practiced
10. Use of Cordilleran material culture such as traditional attire (“ <i>wanes</i> ” and “ <i>tapis</i> ”) during special occasions and gatherings	3.04	1.01	Much practiced
11. Instruction of proper wearing of “ <i>wanes</i> ” and “ <i>tapis</i> ,” and other Cordilleran ethnic attire to children	2.87	1.06	Sometimes practiced
12. Assignment and consistent use of Igorot/Cordilleran names or lineage-based names for children	2.56	1.08	Sometimes practiced
Overall	2.93	0.98	Sometimes practiced

Abbreviation: SD: Standard deviation.

Notably, five of the 12 indicators surveyed were rated as “much practiced.” The highest mean of 3.39 was recorded for practices related to enacting Igorot values, such as strong familial ties, communalism, and culturalism, often expressed through playing gongs, performing Indigenous dances, and conducting rituals. The practice of “*og-ogbo*” or “*og-ogfo*” (community gatherings and collective labor) garnered the second-highest mean of 3.35. These findings underline the Igorot community’s enduring commitment to cultural preservation despite the challenges posed by their transnational existence in North America. Table 2 shows the mean comparison on the extent of practice of culturally rooted and Indigenous-related activities at home and during cultural gatherings according to the respondent groupings.

Statistical analysis using the *F*-test reveals that the *f*-values are 1.608 ($p=0.211$), 0.815 ($p=0.546$), and 1.822 ($p=0.173$) for civil status, ethnic affiliation, and years of stay, respectively. These results indicate that the null hypotheses cannot be rejected. Furthermore, this suggests that civil status, ethnic affiliation, and the length of stay in the US do not significantly influence the extent of the practice of Igorot-Americans’ practice of their customs

and traditions. In other words, these factors appear to have no notable impact on the maintenance and preservation of Indigenous culture and traditions among Igorot-Americans. More importantly, even those Igorots married to American or Canadian spouses continue to preserve their culture and beliefs within their households.

The next section presents the mechanisms that Igorot-Americans employ to sustain their Indigenous practices within family and communal spheres.

3.2. Mechanisms for sustaining Indigenous practices

Igorot-Americans’ attachment to their Indigenous heritage is deeply embedded in their daily lives and remains central to their identity within the diaspora. From the constructivist grounded theory analysis, five major themes emerged, elaborating on the mechanisms used to preserve their cultural practices.

3.2.1. Living the Igorot life in various aspects of being

Igorot-Americans exhibit sustained cultural performativity of Indigenous practices within both home and community spheres. At home, Igorot parents continue to observe rituals such as “*atang*” (a thanksgiving ritual) when

Table 2. Mean comparison on the extent of practice of culturally rooted and Indigenous-related activities at home and during cultural gatherings according to the respondent groupings

Grouping	Mean	DE	SD	<i>f</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
Civil status					
Married to a fellow Igorot	2.86	MP	0.56	1.608	0.211
Married to a fellow Filipino	2.71	MP	1.00		
Married to a foreigner	2.33	SP	0.94		
Ethnic Affiliation					
Bontok	2.73	MP	0.76	0.815	0.546
Applai/Kankanaey (Mountain Province)	3.02	MP	0.63		
Kankanaey (Benguet)	2.53	MP	0.80		
Ibaloi	2.57	MP	0.78		
Ifugao	2.54	MP	0.57		
Kalinga	3.00	MP	0.82		
Years of stay					
0 – 5 years	2.22	SP	0.21	1.822	0.173
6 – 14 years	3.07	MP	0.83		
15 years and above	2.76	MP	0.67		

Abbreviation: DE: Descriptive equivalent; MP: Much practiced; SD: Standard deviation; SP: Sometimes practiced.

preparing traditional dishes like “*pinikpikan*” for special occasions. They actively teach their children about the cultural significance of these practices. In addition, they encourage their children to wear traditional attire such as the “*tapis*” (woven skirt for women) and “*wanes*” (woven garb for men) during cultural gatherings, as well as to learn traditional instruments such as gongs and perform Indigenous dances such as the “*sagmi*” (traditional dance movement for women).

During the virtual interview, one participant, who has lived in the US for 16 years and has two first-generation Igorot-American children, shared: “The more we do it, the more it becomes part of us.” This statement underscores the role of daily cultural engagement in keeping Igorot cultural practices alive. On social media, particularly on Facebook, posts from BIBAK members (such as those in the Northeast region) frequently highlight these cultural expressions. For instance, during significant life events such as weddings, graduations, and the annual “Grand Canao” (the annual gathering of BIBAK organizations), members often wear traditional Igorot clothing or garments made from Cordilleran woven fabrics. These acts of cultural performativity demonstrate the community’s ongoing commitment to living the Igorot way of life.

3.2.2. Preserving Indigenous practices through organizational and communal affiliations

A prominent trend in the data underscores the importance of cultural organizations, such as BIBAK, in sustaining Igorot identity and practices in the diaspora. These organizations serve as platforms for cultural preservation, offering opportunities for communal gatherings, celebrations, and cultural education. The widespread presence of BIBAK chapters across the US and Canada facilitates the transmission of Igorot cultural traditions to younger generations. Many respondents view these organizations as informal educational spaces where children can learn about their heritage.

Survey results confirm this observation: Respondents rated the practice of communalism and strong familial ties as the most widely upheld Igorot values, with a mean score of 3.39. Similarly, the concept of “*og-ogfo*” or community solidarity – evident in collective efforts supporting educational, health, and cultural projects in both the US and the Philippines – received a mean score of 3.35. These findings highlight the significance of communal engagement in preserving Igorot traditions and identity. Qualitative analysis of FGD data reinforces findings from the survey. Almost all participants shared that, despite their busy schedules, they participate in these organizations and attend even the smallest gatherings to help ensure their children continue learning about their Indigenous culture.

3.2.3. Sustaining and sharing Indigenous oral traditions with children

Igorot immigrants place significant value on oral traditions as vital tools for cultural preservation. Narratives passed down through generations – referred to as “*bagbaga*,” “*is-istorya*,” and “*ug-ugud*” (traditional storytelling genres) – are key to maintaining cultural continuity in the diaspora. Parents often engage in informal family conversations, recounting stories about their homeland, family history, and cultural practices. These stories not only provide children with a deeper understanding of their heritage but also serve as a counterbalance to the dominant Western narratives encountered through social media and other platforms.

Participants in the FGD shared that these oral traditions are seen as powerful means of instilling values such as respect for elders, humility, and community cohesion. They also noted that casual conversations during meals that center on Indigenous practices can serve as impactful reminders to their children of the values preserved by their ancestors through cultural practices. Many parents also rely on printed books featuring Cordilleran culture

to educate their children about Indigenous knowledge systems. This oral and narrative approach helps transmit virtues that are often absent from modern, mainstream education, and media.

3.2.4. Encouraging children to explore Indigenous culture through technology

In the technologically advanced environment of the US, social media and digital platforms have become essential tools for cultural transmission. While respondents recognized the enduring value of oral traditions for sharing knowledge, they also acknowledged technology's role in reaching younger generations. Igorot parents often share videos, documentaries, and other media related to Cordilleran culture to help their children connect with their heritage. However, they approach this use of technology with caution. Respondents expressed concern about the potential for children to be misinformed by Western-centric, imperialist narratives online. One parent, who has lived in the US for 12 years and has two children aged 7 and 3, emphasized: "It is possible for a person born outside the motherland to learn their native culture and language by watching YouTube, yet some materials could also be misleading." This statement highlights the dual role of technology in both educating and protecting younger generations from distorted representations of their culture.

3.2.5. Multi-language practices

Multilingualism is another key aspect of Igorot's identity in the diaspora. The study found that Igorots practice multi-languaging, incorporating not only their heritage languages (e.g., Kankanaey, Applai, Bontok, Ibaloi, Tuwali, and Biga) but also Ilokano (a regional lingua franca), Filipino (the national language), and English. These languages are used interchangeably at home and within the community, particularly during cultural events and gatherings.

Multilingual practices serve as vital tools for maintaining cultural ties in both domestic and communal contexts. As one respondent from the Applai ethnolinguistic group who has lived in the US for nearly 5 years shared: "Simply understanding many words in the Sagada dialect helps our grandchild feel at ease when our fellow Igorots visit us." This multilingual approach helps children navigate the complexities of hybrid identities, providing them with a sense of belonging both within households and the broader community.

Immigrant children's ability to communicate in multiple languages not only supports language maintenance but also fosters a sense of flexibility and connection to both their heritage and their diasporic surroundings. These practices contribute to the development of dynamic,

hybrid identities, which are essential for sustaining Igorot cultural identity in a multicultural environment.

The following section explores how Igorot-Americans engage in identity (re)construction within the US diaspora. Overall, the complexity of this identity process is understood as a non-threatening outcome of preserving Indigenous systems and practices within a Western context, where both home and the community spheres intersect. The findings highlight the interplay among three key social dynamics – mutual accommodation, sociocultural consciousness, and place-based consciousness – that influence how Igorot immigrants negotiate and adapt their identities in a diasporic setting. These dynamics suggest that identity reconstruction is an ongoing negotiation of power relations, shaped by hybrid cultural practices emerging from interactions with both the homeland and the host country.

3.3. Dynamics of identity (re)construction among Igorot-Americans

3.3.1. Mutual accommodation

Igorot-Americans in the US diaspora actively engage in a process of identity hybridization – a balancing act between their Indigenous cultural traditions and the dominant cultural influences of their host countries. This process unfolds in postmodern communal spaces, where globalized norms in the US and Canada interact with the ongoing recognition of cultural and Indigenous beliefs. The tension between global hegemonies and cultural preservation is particularly visible in the way Igorot-Americans articulate the distinctions between their cultural practices and those of their host countries.

Parents often emphasize the importance of understanding and embracing their cultural roots to ensure their children's adaptability and long-term integration within American and Canadian societies. One parent shared, "In a melting pot like the US, it is incumbent upon us to have an identity or risk being out of place or being left alone." This statement underscores the urgency of retaining a sense of cultural identity amid the pressures to conform to the mainstream. Such sentiments align with existing scholarship on transnational diaspora, which recognizes how migration challenges fixed identities while fostering the creation of hybrid, fluid identities rooted in both homeland culture and host-country experiences (Ashcroft *et al.*, 2002; Chiang, 2010).

Igorot-American parents, therefore, engage in continuous cultural transmission – instilling both cultural knowledge and self-awareness in their children as they navigate different social and cultural contexts. This cultural

continuity is essential in the diaspora, where identity is not fixed but is continuously reconstructed in response to shifting cultural landscapes.

3.3.2. Sociocultural consciousness

In addition to hybridization, sociocultural consciousness is a critical feature of Igorot identity reconstruction in the diaspora. Igorot immigrants are acutely aware of the socio-political structures and cultural practices of their host countries. They remain vigilant about how these systems affect their children's self-identity and are willing to adapt as needed. One parent who has been residing in the US for 18 years pointed out, "Current US policies dictate that people assimilating with the US kind of life should adapt. Hence, it is but natural that policies here on kids' upbringing are 'generally American.'"

This process of double consciousness, as theorized by Du Bois (1903), is pertinent in the context of Igorot immigrants. They navigate between an inner self – rooted in their Indigenous values and practices – and an outer self, influenced by the socio-political and cultural norms of their new environment. This dual awareness shapes how Igorot-Americans perceive their identity and how they raise their children to engage with multiple cultural systems.

In this way, sociocultural consciousness is not just about preserving cultural practices but also about recognizing the complexities of their children's experiences in a multi-ethnic society. Parents strive to educate their children not only about their heritage but also about how to engage critically with the social influences around them that shape their evolving sense of self.

3.3.3. Place-based consciousness

The concept of place-based consciousness reflects how Igorot-Americans strategically negotiate their cultural preservation in response to local conditions. For instance, persistent anti-immigrant rhetoric from various sectors in the US society has prompted Igorot-Americans to exercise caution when practicing certain cultural traditions publicly. The president of one of the BIBAK organizations noted, "For things [on cultural preservation practices], I have to be sure that there are no prohibitions against doing so. True, it is a free country, but I don't think it is worth it when one insists on doing something (for the sake of pretense of practicing one's culture or tradition) unless it is necessary."

This discourse demonstrates that cultural preservation is not only about maintaining traditional practices but also about making them contextually appropriate – ensuring that cultural expressions respect the norms and regulations

of the host society. Igorot-Americans maintain a dynamic relationship with their homeland culture, where their cultural performativity is carefully calibrated to ensure its meaningfulness within their new social environment.

Place-based consciousness is also evident in how Igorot-Americans balance the transmission of cultural practices with the need for social adaptation. For example, during their children's graduation ceremonies, many Igorots incorporate traditional attire (e.g., native garb) alongside the academic regalia. This act of cultural performativity is a subtle yet powerful affirmation of their heritage. However, Igorot families are also mindful of the dominant social norms, such as celebrating Thanksgiving in the "American way" while integrating traditional food like "*pinikpikan*" into the meal.

As one parent articulated, "We sustain our cultural beliefs by just doing what can be done and taking into consideration the sensitivities of those around us – that is, my right ends where others' rights begin." This statement illustrates how Igorot-Americans continuously adapt their cultural practices to fit the social context, exercising critical consciousness in the process of identity reconstruction.

4. Discussion

While traditional theories of identity (such as assimilation, acculturation, and mutual accommodation) frame ethnic and indigenous groups along a continuum of integration versus non-conformity, this study reveals that the diasporic space itself shapes the identity reconstruction process. The lived experiences of Igorot-Americans in the US challenge the binary concept of assimilation versus cultural preservation, suggesting a more nuanced and context-dependent approach.

The contextual nature of identity construction was illuminated through the discourse of Igorot immigrants in the US. The social dynamics of mutual accommodation, sociocultural consciousness, and place-based consciousness emerged as central concepts, particularly in considering how Igorot-Americans adapt their cultural practices in racially and historically demarcated spaces like the US. This awareness stems from the external forces at play, such as racism, classism, and anti-immigrant sentiments, which continue to influence how Igorot-Americans engage with their new environment.

4.1. Emerging theory

The issue of Americanization is another key theme that emerged in the study. Many first-generation Igorot-American children face the question of whether to assimilate fully into American culture or to retain their Indigenous identity. While there is a general belief that

assimilation may dilute their original cultural practices, some parents contend that hybrid identity – combining elements of both Igorot and American cultures – can be achieved without losing their heritage. One respondent emphasized, “We are not “Americanized;” we are the same “Igorots” who came from the Philippines.”

This tension between Americanization and maintaining Igorot identity highlights the complexity of racial identification in the diaspora. The study challenges essentialist notions of identity, proposing instead that Igorot-Americans experience identity fluidity. Their sense of belonging is shaped by subjective experiences that reflect the realities of their daily lives in a multicultural society.

In this context, Igorot identity is not static or confined to one cultural frame but is rather an evolving construct that adapts to the hybridized spaces they occupy. The dynamic and genuine conviction of these immigrants’ identities further exemplifies how ethnic groups in the diaspora navigate the intersections of cultural identity and self-perception through lived experience. The emerging framework from this study is provided in Figure 2.

4.2. Emerging model on identity reconstruction and cultural preservation

This study presents an emerging theoretical model that moves beyond the binary models of assimilation and cultural preservation (Berry, 1980; 2005; 2006; Ryder *et al.*, 1999, 2000; Schwartz *et al.*, 2010). The place-based consciousness of Igorot immigrants suggests that identity reconstruction is not simply about choosing between cultural continuity and assimilation but about navigating hybridized spaces. These spaces allow for the expression of both Igorot and dominant cultural values, offering a more dynamic and context-dependent model of identity reconstruction. This

emerging theoretical model provides new insights into how Indigenous and ethnic groups in the diaspora can sustain their cultural practices while simultaneously adapting to the demands of their new environments. It challenges traditional paradigms and highlights the complexity and fluidity of identity construction in a globalized world by underpinning the interrelatedness of globalization and identity hybridization. While local cultures face serious threats due to trends in global citizenship, these same elements become a springboard for Igorot-Americans to reconnect with their roots and embrace hybridity as a means of coping with contemporary trends.

Igorot-Americans in the diaspora continue to practice rituals and traditions within both family and communal spaces. Cultural activities such as rituals (“atang,” “bagbaga,” and “og-ogod”) and the preparation of Indigenous dishes (e.g., “pinikpikan” with “etag”) during special occasions reflect a living heritage that persists within the household setting. In addition, language practices (such as teaching local dialects) and the playing of traditional music (such as gongs) represent efforts to ensure that younger generations maintain a connection to their cultural heritage.

Beyond these family-based activities, BIBAK organizations play a crucial role in preserving cultural practices and fostering a sense of community among Igorot-Americans. These organizations serve as important spaces of solidarity, where members can share experiences, support one another, and participate in events that emphasize cultural preservation and identity affirmation. The findings highlight that, despite some practices becoming less common, Igorot families remain committed to the transmission of cultural knowledge to younger generations. This commitment is further exemplified by the emphasis on teaching children to properly wear traditional clothing and to engage with Indigenous music, practices, and values.

Technology has emerged as a vital tool for overcoming geographical and social barriers, enabling Igorot-Americans to share cultural practices, participate in online events, and access educational resources related to their heritage. Through these platforms, Igorot-Americans in the US diaspora maintain strong connections with their culture, including their relatives back home. The ability to virtually connect with other Igorots worldwide has become a powerful way of preserving cultural traditions, passing down knowledge, and creating a sense of global community. Moreover, these technologies have provided new opportunities for cultural expression, communication, and education, even in the face of the physical separation that migration often brings. The study highlights the resilience and adaptability of Igorot immigrants as they

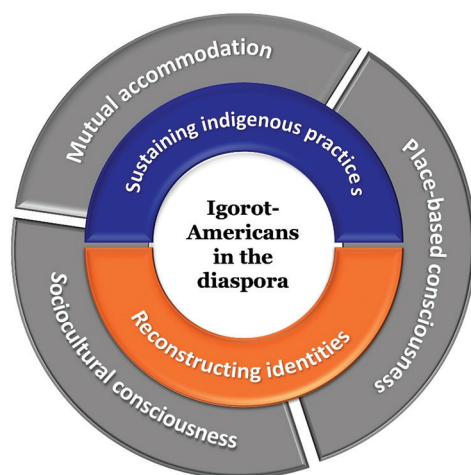


Figure 2. Emerging framework on identity reconstruction

sustain their cultural identity while living in a postcolonial, highly developed world. The complex relationship between the local (Indigenous culture) and the global (Western influences) necessitates a deeper understanding of how cultural practices evolve in response to the unique challenges of migration. The findings suggest that transnational diasporas offer a unique lens through which we can explore hybrid identities and cultural preservation in a migratory context.

Furthermore, the research calls for a shift in the social sciences toward exploring the counter-hegemonic efforts of Indigenous communities worldwide. Rather than solely focusing on the challenges posed by migration and assimilation, there is a need to examine how IPs, like the Igorot-Americans, engage in active cultural reclamation and resistance to the pressures of Western hegemony.

5. Conclusion

The study on Igorot-Americans in the US transnational diaspora provides an insightful exploration of how Igorot families sustain their Indigenous cultural practices while navigating the complexities of life in highly developed, postcolonial contexts. Despite the challenges posed by Western societal demands, the findings demonstrate a strong commitment among Igorot families to preserve and transmit their culture to future generations. This process of identity reconstruction is shaped by both mutual accommodation to Western societal norms and a deep-seated desire to maintain authentic connections to their Indigenous roots.

This study provides valuable insights into how Igorot-Americans in the US manage the complexities of identity reconstruction and cultural preservation within the broader context of migration and globalization. It underscores the importance of hybrid identities and highlights the role of media and technology in sustaining Indigenous practices. By engaging with both their cultural heritage and the modern world, Igorot-Americans in the diaspora successfully preserve their rich traditions while embracing the opportunities that come with living in postcolonial, developed nations.

The study also offers recommendations for Igorot-American communities in the transnational diaspora to further strengthen their efforts to maintain cultural practices and ensure that the next generation remains connected to their roots. As the findings suggest, diaspora communities are not passive recipients of Western influence but active agents in shaping their own identities and cultural futures. Future research should continue to explore these post-colonial efforts, providing new perspectives on migration, cultural preservation, and identity formation in a globalized world.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Author contributions

Conceptualization: All authors

Data curation: Mark Preston S. Lopez

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Ethics approval and consent to participate

The study was approved by the Mountain Province State University Research Ethics Committee (approval number IRECEX2239). All participants completed and submitted informed consent forms before their participation in the study.

Consent for publication

Participants provided written consent for the publication of the data obtained from them through the informed consent form.

Availability of data

The data presented in this study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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