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Televising Ethnicity: (re)Constructing Igorot Identity In Popular Television

Indigenous peoples (IP) in the Philippines, tagged as ethnic minorities, have long faced ostracism in all forms. I argue that the mass media, particularly TV, the most influential media technology that influences popular culture, have a hand in this. Broadcast TV integrates ethnic images and places them on the mainstream media for mass consumption.

My paper looks into the ways in which Philippine television has constructed the Igorot's ethnic identity through five TV texts which were broadcast in the country's two leading commercial TV stations: Coca Cola's advertisement Tribute; Rated K's dramatized documentary on Had-dakan; Raffy Tima's I-Witness documentary on the Banaue Rice Terraces; the 8th season of noontime soap Daisy Siete; and reality-based talent search StarStruck.

My analysis will show that the dominant representations of Igorot's television images are metonymical of the other: backward, inferior, passive, eccentric, separate and different. These notions are reinforced by Coca-Cola's advertisement Tribute, which showed the Igorot as a mere exotic stop-over who poses for photographs to entertain the tourists; Daisy Siete's Season 8 soap opera Igorota, which used the voice of the periphery to glorify the imagined superiority of the center; and Rated K's Doon Po Sa Amin segment Had-dakan, which presents Lagawe, Ifugao's traditional judicial practice, almost without context, to epitomize their supposed primitive resistance to modernity.

My paper will further show that the television images of indigenous peoples is a product of a long historical divide between the majority and minority which traces itself back to the Philippines' colonial past.