

Federalizing the Philippines: What Does It Mean for the Igorot Indigenous Peoples?

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Abstract : The unitary form of Philippine government has built a tradition of bureaucracy that strengthened oligarch and clientele politics. Consequently, the Philippines is lagged behind development. There is so much poverty, unemployment, and inadequate social services. In addition, it seems that the rights of national ethnic minority groups like the Igorots to develop their political and economic interests, linguistic and cultural heritage are neglected. Given these circumstances, a paradigm shift is inevitable. The author advocates a transition from a unitary to a federal system of government. Contrary to the notion that a unitary system facilitates better governance, it actually stifles it. As a unitary government, the Philippines seems (a) to exhibit incompetence in delivering efficient, necessary services to the people and (b) to exclude the minority from political participation and policy making. This shows that Philippine unitary system is highly centralized and operates from a top-bottom scheme. However, a federal system encourages decentralization, plurality and political participation. In my view, federalism is beneficial to the Philippine society and congenial to the Igorot indigenous peoples insofar as participative decision-making and development goals are concerned. This research employs critical and constructive analyses. The former interprets some complex practices of Philippine politics while the latter investigates how theories of federalism can be appropriated to deal with political deficits, ethnic diversity, and indigenous peoples' rights to self-determination. The topic is developed accordingly: First, the author briefly examines the unitary structure of the Philippines and its impact on inter-governmental affairs and processes, asserting that bureaucracy and corruption, for example, are counterproductive to a participative political life, to economic development and to the recognition of national ethnic minorities. Second, he scrutinizes why federalism might transform this. Here, he assesses various opposing philosophical contentions on federal system in managing ethnically diverse society, like the Philippines, and argue that decentralization of political power, economic and cultural developments are reasons to exit from unitary government. Third, he suggests that federalism can be instrumental to Igorots self-determination. Self-determination is neither opposed to national development nor to the ideals of democracy - liberty, justice, solidarity. For example, as others have already noted, a politics in the vernacular facilitates greater participation among the people. Hence, there is a greater chance to arrive at policies that serve the interest of the people. Some may wary that decentralization disintegrates a nation. According to the author, however, the recognition of minority rights which includes self-determination may promote filial devotion to the state. If Igorot indigenous peoples have access to suitable institutions to determine their political life, economic goals, social needs, i.e., education, culture, language, chances are it moves the country forward to development fostering national unity. Remarkably, federal system thus best responds to the Philippines's democratic and development deficits. Federalism can also significantly rectify the practices that oppress and dislocate national ethnic minorities as it ensures the creation of localized institutions for optimum political, economic, cultural determination and maximizes representation in the public sphere.

Keywords : federalism, Igorot, indigenous peoples, self-determination

Conference Title : ICSP 2015 : International Conference on Society and Philosophy

Conference Location : Berlin, Germany

Conference Dates : May 21-22, 2015