# Ethnicity and Empowerment: Looking Beyond the Theory of "Democracy" in Governance

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*Although central authority is necessary to ensure that resources and benefits are equitably distributed within and across local units, centralized policies cannot be sustained nor effective in the long-run. It is therefore imperative to resolve social disparity through measures of decentralization fashioned towards strengthening the local political units' capabilities to govern themselves. Empowerment of diverse ethnic communities and recognition of their right to nurture their own development are essential requisites in nation-building and in upholding democracy in a multi-ethnic society. The upsurge of ethnic nationalism poses the challenge of redefining and reformulating "democracy" so as to include the advancement and protection not only of individual rights but also the collective rights of indigenous peoples and their politico-territorial control over their domain in its primary concerns.*

## Introduction

The concept of mass or "majoritarian" democracy (Westminster model), perceptively, complements the ideals of mass production and mass consumption of post-industrialism. As economic modernization requires the homogenization of both production and consumption, the age of mass democracy is characterized by the immense concentration of power at the level of the nation-state. However, with the advance of local empowerment, resistance to globalization and heightened ethnic and racial consciousness, democracy seems to be "de-massified."

Historical as well as contemporary experiences show that ethnic identities did not wither away to class consciousness (as the Marxists assert) or to a state-sanctioned "nation-building" project. Paradoxically, the homogenizing policies of modern nation-states have worked to the contrary. "Developmentalism" and "modernization" ushered a marked deepening of ethnic conflicts worldwide.

In this context, old concepts, models, and paradigms of "majoritarian" democratic governance must be re-thought and re-studied in relation to the question of cultural diversity. The phenomena of ethnic struggles for self-

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determination deserve a closer look if stability of the state and better governance are to be achieved in a multi-ethnic society.

This paper addresses the following concerns: (1) the spatial dimension of public policy relative to the demand of ethnic minority groups for political autonomy and self-determination; (2) the debates on the theories and concepts of democracy; and (3) the reexamination of the current concept of democracy and its reformulation within the context of the reemergence of ethnic nationalism in the world as well as its relevance to governing a multi-ethnic society.

## Ethnicity and the Spatial Function of Public Policy on Local Governance

The spatial dimension of public policy is reflected in the territorial administration of the state—a function considered basic in all states, regardless of types. It becomes integral to public policy when the state specifically, intends to correct social and economic disparity among regions as well as local governmental units (LGUs) or there is a deliberate attempt to treat some geographical areas differently from others by virtue of distinctive ethnic, cultural, religious or linguistic customs predominant within a particular territory.

In this context, a substantial measure of decentralized administration becomes imperative. However, some analysts note that decentralization need not always have a territorial dimension. For instance, national functions and services transferred to local government units (LGUs) which relate to public education, health, infrastructure, environment, transport or promotion of agriculture, industry and commerce are intended to be uniform and comprehensive throughout the state, regulated and supervised by the national government. These have national application without any distinction as to geographical area.

Ocampo (1991:195) justifies centralization for the following reasons: (1) the efficiency it contributes for large-scale governmental operations; (2) effectivity in dealing with external economies; (3) provisions of system-wide knowledge; and (4) highly specialized innovations necessary in resolving national problems. It is contended that these functions transcend the capacities or political boundaries of individual local units. Furthermore, he warns that decentralization and autonomy should not be used to "defeat national policies which should be observed by all" and enforced by the central government on a nationwide basis (Ocampo 1991:201-2).

Significantly, policies addressing spatial disparity or uneven and imbalanced national development require redistributive measures affecting labor-market management, areas of production and productivity, investments, and public finance. In other words, policies entail either regulation or support to an

economic activity with a view of creating a relatively balanced and spatially distributed growth and development in the entirety of the nation.

Redistributive measures and regulatory policies, nonetheless, tend to be centralized and applied in a national scale rather than a specific territorial unit. Ocampo (1991:196) states that central authority is necessary to ensure "equitable distribution of resources and benefits within and across local units."

The exigencies of confronting spatial disparity by restricting or supplementing economic behavior according to market principles, attending to spatial determinants and consequences of economic fluctuations, and regulating the behavior of national aggregates of income, consumption, savings and investments presuppose that the problems of local underdevelopment cannot be simply addressed in a short-run through the measures of decentralization. Structural deficiencies obtaining from the whole national economy or economic system itself rather than factors peculiar to a particular area demands an application of a general policy thrust to resolve the structural causes of disparity.

Notwithstanding, centralized policies cannot be sustained nor effective in the long-run, normally for reasons of public finance (Coombes *et al.* 1989). Moreover, national policies are rarely equipped with enough means of realizing their results due to "structural deficiencies," i.e. inadequate investments or inefficient utilization of resources, which cannot be solved with the legal and technical competencies (Keating and Jones 1986; Parsons 1986; and Yuill *et al.* 1980 cited in Coombes 1989).

Inasmuch as spatial disparity would be difficult to resolve in a long-term and permanent basis as long as redistributive policies emanate from the central government, the alternative approach therefore, is to address the problem from a truly territorial perspective. In effect, this means that measures of decentralization must be continually and consistently fashioned towards strengthening local political units' capabilities to govern themselves.

Decentralization, therefore, must inexorably have a territorial dimension. Coombes *et al.* (1989) for instance, assert that the persistence of serious spatial disparities is attributable to the imbalanced relationship between central and local levels of public administration:

> When policymakers admit a need to introduce a specifically spatial dimension to national measures of economic management or social welfare, it usually implies some fundamental imbalance or insufficiency in the capacity of local communities to govern themselves.... Local authorities may have been deprived of adequate legal or financial powers, and that in itself may be a consequence of inappropriate structures of local administration (Coombes 1989:111).

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Owing much influence from the writings of academic geographers and a new school of environmental planners, the idea that the state should make deliberate efforts to affect the location of economic activities within its subnational political units has been a "contemporary doctrine" by the 1960s (Stöhr and Taylor 1981:76). Nevertheless, decentralization has not been able to institute any major restructuring or redistribution of public authority nor its effects have been significant (Hayward and Watson 1975:287, 217-94).

Parsons (1986) argues that subnational development policies have been geared not towards self-government but have been intended to improve the efficiency of centralized administration, including the planning and management of national economy:

> Spatial categorization linguistically, as well as politically, simplifies and reduces what are complex, multi-faceted problems into solutions we can live with. Thus 'regional policy' has never evolved into the 'integrated' planning system which its proponents urged on government, but rather it has been about cutting the problem down to available means and minimizing the damage to the main goals of national economic policy (Parsons 1986:261-2).

Apparently, the absence of a territorial dimension in decentralization cannot assure a long-term solution to major contemporary problems brought about by the inherent deficiencies of socioeconomic and political structures. The relationship between territory and political function in the principles of public policy with spatial dimension is a major consideration not only in addressing the problems of spatial differences but also in local governance.

Evidently, any claim or distinction based on territory is quintessentially political. Treating a problem as territorial implies that it is more than simply economic or social and even more than a problem of environment. It is a problem of self-government and self-rule.

The issue of territory becomes extremely important especially among ethnic groups. Their identity is, above all other things, territorial identity. It involves the historic identification of an ethnic group within a given territory—an attachment to a particular place. This geo-ethnic identity is regarded as "group politico-territorial identity" (Knight 1984:168-190).

The primacy of territory to identity implies physical control over a certain piece of earth and for people and institutions to develop loyalty and allegiance to such territory. The process or processes by which this is attained is referred to as "territoriality" which Sack (1986:19) defines as: "The attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships, by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area."

One of the most vital reasons cited by territoriality as a viable means of exercising control is that it reifies power. Territory promotes certain interests which require social control by associating them with a place within which that control is exercised. In other words, people holding common identity and sharing the same territory frequently have the same interests and sense of solidarity by virtue of spatial proximity.

Thus far, the right to one's identity is tied with the right to control one's territorial homeland which includes social, economic, and political control. The absence of or restriction to such control may invariably threaten the fulfillment of the peoples' rights and imperil their identity to a particular territory. In this respect, the anxiety of the indigenous people over the future of their homeland simply implies their lack of full control over their lives.

Geo-ethnicity, therefore, reflects a sense of pride and identity in a given territory and can become a force for socioeconomic development. Ethnic pride and the love of the homeland can be translated into developmental efforts to uplift the depressed conditions of the minorities. If properly nurtured, geo-ethnicity, can form the basis of productive self-government and popular participation in the affairs of the state.

The creation of a geographical area as a political unit bestowed with "special" treatment or status by invoking its distinct ethnic, cultural, religious, and customary characteristics is usually justified on political, economic, and moral grounds. This approach addresses the problem of spatial difference from a territorial perspective relative to collective identity and scale of political and administrative organization.

Oftentimes, the conferment of such status is a product of continued and intense pressures on central government from the local communities itself rather than peacefully bequeathed to the people. Claims of this kind, which usually relate to the defense of territorial interests, are pressed by movements going as far as to campaign for secession or by moderate groups demanding legal and constitutional privileges or concessions.

The demands for self-government by ethnic communities have led to a variety of special arrangement which are political in nature: regional autonomy within a unitary or federal system (Mongolia in China or Bavaria in Deutschland); special regions which are constitutionally recognized (Quebec in Canada or Flanders and Walloons in Belgium); and special administrative department or agency (Scotland and Ireland in United Kingdom). Given the distinct interests and special needs of these groups within a state, a spatial dimension on national policies is provided (Rokkan and Urwin 1982).

The unprecedented growth of movements among ethnic groups seeking substantial political autonomy from their respective states has been variously termed as "new regionalism," "modern nationalism" or "ethnic nationalism." It is even identified with the ancient political principle of "subsidiarity" which states that authority should not be transferred to higher levels of government unless it cannot be adequately exercised at the lower levels.

Moreover, the intensity and significance of these movements have provoked the emergence of two related schools of thought in politics and administration: territorial politics (concerned with sociological aspects); and intergovernmental relations (emphasizing constitutional and administrative forms/procedures in defusing power concentration) (Meny and Wright 1985; Rhodes and Wright 1987; Hanf and Scharp 1978).

The phenomenon of power redemocratization has broadened the political and social significance of development especially those relating to territorial identity and scale of organization. The model of "development from below" has gained new meaning and values underscoring its uniqueness and heterogeneity since it evolves in a society whose development goals are defined by the people in accordance with their available and potential resources—human, physical, and institutional; egalitarian in nature as society emphasizes to meet the basic needs of its members (Stohr and Taylor 1981:454).

The political efficacy of communities that have strong affinity and identification to their territory likewise contributed to the realization of endogenous development. Stohr, citing the European experience, states:

> The presence of (territorial) identity appears as an important prerequisite, both for cooperation among diverse interest groups within the region and for the retention or recuperation of initiative and creative personalities in the region. In most cases a direct linkage between economic functions and various forms of entrepreneurial or territorial self-determination are provided for. This usually results in a high level of identification of the local/regional population and innovative programmes (in Bassand et al. 1986:71).

As political decentralization seeks to empower subnational governmental units of the state without undermining its own sovereignty and self-preservation rights, ethnic communities likewise have the inviolable right to self-determination and self-government. The right of the latter to govern in their homelands is an expression of political autonomy that they possessed and exercised since time as far as memory goes.

The ethnic communities' concept of homeland, which is inconspicuous in other LGUs created by the state, defines the territorial dimension of decentralization. It is highly significant in the spatial analysis of public policy on

local governance as it provides an understanding on self-reliant endogenous development.

In this respect, the question on the right to self-determination and concept of homeland constitutes the essence of political autonomy for the ethnic communities. Obviously, these concerns are inevitable issues that must be addressed by the state presumably committed to local government autonomy and decentralization apart from realizing the higher goals of national unity and development.

Nonetheless, the growing quest for self-determination is intricately woven with the rising affirmation of identities among ethnic groups. The broadening and intensification of ethnic conflict in the current era of post-industrialism among independent states seem to indicate the pervasiveness of ethnic identity in the assertion of the right to self-determination.

It appears, therefore, that the process of decolonization was not able to guarantee the autonomy of ethnic groups from the state to which they belong.

## The Resurgence of Ethnic Struggles and Quest for Democracy in Post-Industrial Society

The period of decolonization has brought about the emergence of new States but not new Nations as a mosaic of different ethnic and cultural communities were incorporated within the state's legal and political framework. On the contrary, the ossification of the state led to the destruction of the existing and would-be nations (Connor 1972).

Smith (1981:10) established that ethnic resistance began to grow among newly independent nation-states which emerged after the Second World War because "State's structures seldom provide for ethnic rights." Nor for that matter are states sympathetic to and share ethnic aspirations for greater autonomy:

> The inability of the States to accommodate and give redress to ethnic
> grievances and fulfill ethnic aspirations increasingly agitated ethnic
> groups into more violent protest actions directed against the State as the
> allocator and dispenser of power and privileges (Abubakar 1989:109).

In the late 1960s, many of the new States' political independence were shaken by sporadic communal violence caused by ethnic and cultural conflicts against the post-modern civilization—both modernism and traditionalism, or what Toffler (1980:311-327) said as the "struggle of the Third Wave." The struggle for power was fought under the banners of nationalism, religion, and civil and political rights. This is the struggle against the age of immense concentration of power at the level of the modern nation-state.

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In the 1970s, these conflicts began to take on more organized forms and gradually took three distinct directions: the achievement of a special status for ethnic groups; regional autonomy; and total independence (Abubakar 1989:109). Ethnic groups which claim to be nations and states began to assert their historic rights to self-determination and complete independence.

In the last two decades, as the world's economy shifted to a higher gear in its "modernizing project," ethnic struggles against their respective states intensified and exploded into separatism—calling for secession, independence, and complete sovereignty from the State.

Nietschmann (cited in Barrameda n.d.:27) found that majority of conflicts worldwide are between states and ethnic communities. He recorded that out of 120 conflicts in 1987, 72 percent (86) are considered state-ethnic strifes; 10 percent as inter-ethnic and insurgent-related conflicts; and 3 percent as wars between states. Furthermore, 98 percent (118) of such conflicts are fought in the Third World countries, with 75 percent (90) of these between Third World states and their ethnic minorities.

These are three-sided, involving the right and left wing insurgents seeking to overthrow the state, and ethnic peoples defending themselves against the "colonialism" of the State. The rebel forces and ethnics may have the same enemy but definitely different goals.

These phenomena debunked the "melting pot" theory which presumes that racial, ethnic, and religious differences are destined to wither away—as an anachronism, as modernization and development produce a unifying effect in terms of a new attachment and identity not at the ethnic levels but at a national level.

The assumption of a post-ethnic consciousness in the developmental paradigm that ethnic identities and loyalties will simply wither away to a working class consciousness as viewed by the Marxists or to the nation-state and the market as perceived by the bourgeois liberalists failed to explain the paradoxical deepening of ethnic identities and conflicts which accelerated in the process of modernization. Ethnic identities, rather than disappearing, have ossified and persisted over class solidarity. Neither did ethnic loyalties concede to the "greater" interest of the nation nor yield to the market forces.

Identities have not dissolved. What have withered away are the conditions under which diverse identities can together share a social space. The positive social change and increased opportunities that should have accompanied modernization— guided by the market, involves massive dislocation and displacement of people from traditional means of livelihood. The shrinkage of social space has taken place where perceived new opportunities have produced a narrower social base.

The seeming economic growth with real spatial shrinkage results in social conflicts between the "majority" and "minority" peoples as they compete for scarce resources and benefits. The complex impacts brought about by modernization, in effect, created new vulnerabilities and new responses which fed into the rise of ethnic consciousness and new ethnic assertions.

Moreover, the outcome of economic vulnerabilities, induced by global integration, became a local economic conflict with an ethnic color:

> Developmentalism, as economism, has become a source of new economic vulnerabilities, and new inequalities. In multi-ethnic societies, where overlap has existed between religious and regional identities and economic functions, issues of economic insecurity and contradictions are very conveniently transformed by the elite into issues of ethnic, caste and religious issues (Kothari 1989:36).

Contrary to the simplistic notion that ethnic differences breed conflicts, it failed to fully account for the presence of long-festering ethnic cells of secession not only in the underdeveloped continents of Asia, Africa, and South America where States tend to be authoritarian and whose societies are characterized as a mosaic of ethnic groupings, but in the developed and more democratic countries of Europe, North America, and Australia.

· Secessionist movements, in fact, intensified in the recent decades of Western modern states, i.e., the Scots, Britons, Celtics, Wales, and Irish in United Kingdom; the Walloons and Flanders along the borders of Belgium, France, and Netherlands; the Basques and Catalonians in the borders of Spain and France; Turks in Germany; Quebecois in Canada; Indians in the United States of America; the Aborigines in Australia; Maoris in New Zealand; and the Ainus in Japan, to mention a few.

In the United States, conflicts rose among immigrants—between the Cubans and Haitians in Miami; Mexicans and Cubans in Los Angeles; American-born Jews and Iranian Jewish in affluent Great Neck, on Long Island near the city of New York. Obviously, this is apart from what the world witnessed in the breaking down of the once Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) into several nation-states and the explosion of ethnicities in Eastern Europe in the last few years.

· Evidently, it is not simply diversity which is responsible for strifes in view of the fact that divergent groups have existed and lived for centuries but conflicts did not reach the grandiose scale and intensity as it has attained in the age of post-industrialism. However, what is new in the current era of post-modernism are the processes involved which made cultural identity incompatible with diversity and made cultural identity a means to gain economic survival and power.

Ostensibly, the sharpened conflicts, not between classes as the Marxists expected but between ethnic groupings—one who holds political and economic power on one hand, and those marginalized who aspire to redeem their lost power on the other hand—are reactions against the centralism of the state which tries to homogenize the entire polyethnic society under a single dominant culture held by the power-wielders in order to effectively respond to the imperatives of world capitalism:

> Ethnicity is a response—including reaction—to the excesses of the modern
> project of shaping the whole humanity (and its natural resource base),
> around the three pivots of world capitalism, the State system and a 'world
> culture' based on modern technology, a pervasive communications and
> information order and a 'universalizing' educational system. The project of
> modernity entails a new mode of homogenizing and of straightjacketing
> the whole world (Kothari 1989:16).

The homogenizing thrusts of capitalism, the nation-state, and technology are endeavors to assimilate, culturally unify, and integrate diverse social formations into a global marketplace under the secular authority of the State which claims superiority over the legitimate rights of other entities to be excluded and espouse different worldview from what is pervading.

Notwithstanding, ethnic identities were seldom surrendered to the imposing power of the modern state with its modernizing missions. Ethnic ties have emotional, psychological, even religious depths, that are not easily severed (Abubakar 1989:109). These are human ontological factors which cannot be subjected to authoritative controls; thus, no amount of coercion or repression can contain human developmental aspirations in an extended period of time (Burton 1991:63).

Under this context, the goal of the central government to integrate, assimilate, and transform multifarious ethnic identities into one national identity through a "downward exertion of State nationalism" would simply be a futile attempt (Lim and Vani 1985:32). Evidently, what has been perceived as the formula for nation-building is the homogenization of the entire society. Homogenization, on the other hand, becomes imperative to achieve the end of modernization and development. Consequently, modernization demands a strong centralized power—short of authoritarianism—at the level of the state and nation.

The assimilationist policy has been manifested through the centralism exercised by the state in the post-colonial period by means of its strategies such as: the emphasis on center-oriented allocation of resources; center-oriented administrative system whereby the government exerts control over all other parts of the country including the peripheral areas inhabited by ethnic groups; and provision of regional and local autonomy which allows peripheral areas to govern themselves and participate in the decisionmaking at the center in accordance with the government's predefined rules and procedures (Lim and Vani 1985:32).

Such policy, however, has been seen as *inapropos* and has been resisted by those groups who do not see themselves as part of the nation. They regarded the policy as tantamount to the erosion of their self-identity and sensed it as a gross violation of their political and economic rights. The concept of nation-building and centralization of power to the nation-state, indeed, resulted in the deprivation of ethnic communities of the power to decide for and to govern themselves in accordance with their ideals and aspirations.

Given such circumstances, the majoritarian type of democracy in a multi-ethnic society becomes incongruent with homogenization—an act exercised by the state in the interest of national unity and development. Obviously, the meaning of democracy is violated when a minority or several minorities (not in a political but ethnic sense) lack(s) any reasonable chance to take part in policy- and decisionmaking process in government on a more or less permanent basis without suffering from the "tyranny of the majority." In other words, majority rule in deeply divided societies is likely to be profoundly undemocratic.

The intolerance borne out of political centralism has in effect engendered the resistance against the "melting pot" and the "ideal" of assimilation in the post-industrial society. Moreover, intolerance precipitates conflict whenever the crisis of the economy shrinks the pie in relation to numbers and aspirations. Thus, rather than uniformity and homogeneity, diversity and heterogeneity have been the growing clamor of ethnic groups —the right to be and remain different:

> Diversity is the new ideal, corresponding to the heterogeneity of the new
> system of wealth creation ... (the melting pot) is being replaced by that of
> the 'salad bowl' — a dish in which diverse ingredients keep their identity
> ... But the salad-bowl ideal means that governments will need new legal
> and social tools they now lack, if they are to referee increasingly complex,
> potentially violent disputes (Toffler 1991:243-244).

In all respects, it becomes evident that building a nation in a multi-ethnic society through the centralized power of the state will simply result in internecine conflicts. Furthermore, the effort to "melt" the indissoluble ethnic identities and abscond from ethnic groups the right to self-governance under their own rules may eventually lead to the creation of a multi-nation-state out of the existing one. Nation-building, thus, requires the empowerment of diverse ethnic communities and recognition of their right to nurture their own development as defined by their culture rather than by the state:

> ... the very formulae of nation-building were deeply flawed. Distrustful of
> devolution, incapable of co-ordinating rational administration with the
> extension of democracy to minorities ... and completely insensitive to the
> nurturing of pluralism—that is what the flawed principles of nation-
> building have been (David and Kadirgamar 1989: 10).

The quest of the ethnic communities for local autonomy, self-government, and survival of their indigenous and self-sustaining culture is embodied in their struggle for self-determination and pristine democracy.

## Redefining Democracy in the Context of Change

Democracy as a term comes from a combination of two Greek words: *demos* (people) and *kratos* (rule or power) or simply the "rule of the people." The term, however, raises a number of complex issues—who are considered to be the people?; how should power be exercised?; how should structures and institutions of power be organized and shaped to reflect people's power?; what kind of participation is envisaged for the people?; what and where is the place of people's obligation and dissent?; under what circumstances, if any, is government entitled to resort to coercion against its own people or against those outside the sphere of legitimate rule?

A definition of democracy, therefore, involves a discussion not merely on the theory about possible ways of organizing the rule of the people but also the philosophy about what ought to be and an understanding of practical experiences with the ways in which government has been structured in different societies at different times. These considerations are often intricately woven in a highly complex manner which this paper cannot cover.

Instead, the paper shall attempt to illustrate that the fundamental assumptions of liberal democracy (the rule of the majority) are no longer relevant. And it is far more meaningful now to define democracy within the context of fast-rising plural societies—villages, regions, ethnic groups, nationalities, religious groups, having distinct cultures at different levels of cultural heterogeneity.

The early contributions to the discussion of democracy go back to ancient Greece. However, it was not until the 19th century when a new body of thought on democracy, based on modern and industrial-capitalist society, emerged. Liberal democracy developed in opposition to the medieval, hierarchical institutions, and despotic monarchies whose rule rested on "divine" support. The liberalists fought for a rollback of state power and the creation of a sphere of civil society without state interference.

The basic liberal principles such as individualism, parliamentary government, limited government, separation of church and state, equality of opportunity, and social reformism have been defended on a wide variety of philosophical foundations. This includes the different types of liberalism embodied under the: natural law philosophy of John Locke; modified utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill; Social Darwinist evolutionism of Herbert Spencer; Hegelian idealism of T.H. Green; and American pragmatism of John Dewey.

All these varieties of liberalism, either classic or modern, tend to dichotomize liberty and authority. The liberalists are in unison in asserting that individual liberty must be maximized and powers of the state limited. This means that when government authority expands through its rules, regulations, and interventions beyond a certain necessary minimum, individual freedom contracts.

Apart from the aforecited principles, the liberalist tradition maintains that liberty and democracy can be achieved only under a capitalist system, which provides the material basis for the former to thrive and prosper. The Marxist tradition believes otherwise and contends that capitalism must be replaced by socialism to realize democracy. However, the liberalist view prevailed as the Marxists failed to construct a political system which can claim to be more democratic than the liberal democracies based on capitalism.

Thus, the current debate on democracy is not in any way concerned with the abolition of capitalism. In fact, it is an affirmation and sustenance of capitalism. The debate lies between those who want to protect "life, liberty, and estate" by rolling back government's intervention in civil society (espoused by the so-called New Right or Neo-Liberalists led by Friedrich von Hayek) on one hand, and those who argue for a reformed capitalism with less inequality and more democracy in political, social, and economic affairs (represented by the liberal cum social democratic group like David Held and Julius Nyerere).

*Individual and Collective Rights*

The contemporary definition of democracy supports the advancement and protection of individual rights and requires both a high degree of accountability of the state and democratic reordering of civil society (Sorensen 1993:10). It calls for a bill of rights which includes civil, political, social, and economic rights to ensure "equal opportunity for participation and for discovering individual preferences" (Sorensen 1993:10).

Given the upsurge of ethnicity, the issue of ethnic rights compared to individual rights becomes a paramount concern relative to the theory of democracy. It is a case of collective or group rights as against individual rights.

It is noteworthy to cite that the United Nations upholds the right of ethnic minorities in states where they exist. Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) of 1966 is the only article in international human rights instruments which addresses the question of the cultural rights of minorities:

> In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, *persons* belonging to such minorities *shall not be denied* the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own

> culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own
> language (UN 1988:30) (italics provided).

It is contended that the aforementioned provision is endeavored to resolve the abstract treatment of individual human rights and advance the rights of minority peoples. On the contrary, the article remains inadequate in ensuring the protection of minority rights for the following reasons:

First, considering that international instruments are prepared and signed by states, they automatically become state instruments serving their own national and political interests. In view of this fact, the acceptance or denial of the existence of minorities as well as the parameters used in the definition of "ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities" evidently revert to the states. This leaves the government absolutely free to determine whether minorities do or do not exist in their country.

Oftentimes, for political reasons, states deny the presence of minorities within their territorial borders. Citing an example:

> ... for many years Latin American states denied there were indigenous
> minorities in their own countries. Today, they admit that such minorities
> do exist. Turkey officially does not recognize the Kurds as a distinctive
> cultural group, calling them the 'mountain Turks'. Bulgaria has asked its
> own citizens of Turkish origin to change their names, because it recognizes
> a Muslim but not a Turkish minority (Stavenhagan 1991:59).

Inasmuch as minority groups do not or seldom have a fair chance to be officially represented in international bodies largely because they are either treated as "dissidents" in their respective states or lack of necessary funding support for travel expenses unlike those "approved" representatives of the states whose travel costs are defrayed by their governments, their existence as a people is hardly felt and their demands for the recognition of their rights have been ignored by their States.

Furthermore, the acknowledgment of their presence either by the international community or state itself is frequently affirmed when violence between ethnic groups and state or between ethnic groups has already spread and reached an unimaginable scale.

Second, Article 27 is concerned with rights of "persons" belonging to minority groups rather than collective or group rights of people having distinct cultural frame and characteristics from the rest of the population of the state. The provision indicates that the bearers of ethnic rights are individuals and not groups. Yet the needs of indigenous peoples can only be expressed in terms of group or "national" rights (Berman 1982:3).

Ethnic rights are not always reducible to individual rights. While the state is functionally a collection of individual citizens whose individual rights are constitutionally guaranteed, ethnic group affiliations with shared identity usually are stronger in protecting and advancing minority citizens' individual rights than the mere sum of "persons" belonging to a minority group acting individually and separately.

Group rights are individual rights employed in collectivities. These can be exercised only through collective action of individuals who share common values. An individual can be a bearer of such rights solely by joining with other members of one's own group. Otherwise, it ceases to be a collective right.

Kothari (1989) perceives that the conception of the collective as a whole rather than a collection of individuals provides an alternative source of security and protection among ethnic groups against the attempt of the state, market, and development process to reduce their identities to isolated "selfs" and abdicate their freedom at the expense of "others." He further says that:

> The regeneration of community, not as a collection of isolated individuals, but as interactive structures both internally and *vis-a-vis* each other, can become an important source of transformation by becoming the basis of collective reconstruction of the 'whole'. It can become the source of alternative people's security, where people derive protection, not from a militarized State but, through the creation of structures of mutual nurturance and protection within and across community spaces ... (i)n which the individual good derives its authenticity from a common good, and individual freedom is seen as freedom for all, not freedom at the cost of others (Kothari 1989:41).

In fact, it is highly inconceivable for an individual to successfully sustain and nurture one's culture, religion, or language outside of one's ethnic group or society. Minority rights, for obvious reasons, can be enjoyed only through the group to which the individual belongs. The denial of a group's collective identity, consequently, means the denial of an individual's rights.

*Territoriality and Territorial Rights*

Horowitz (1985:56-57) once remarked:

> The meaningfulness of ethnic identity (is) derived from its birth connection—it came first—or from the acceptance by an ethnic group as if born into it. In this key respect (the primacy of birth), ethnicity and kinship are alike.

The linkage between identity and territory is nicely summed up by the Maori term *turangawaewae* ("standing place for the feet") which denotes "the rights of a

tribal group in land and the consequential rights of individual members of the group" (Kawhara 1979:3 cited by Knight 1988:126 in Johnston *et al.*).

Poulantzas (1978:114), emphasizing the importance of territory to the notion of group self-identity, refers to the "historicity of a territory and territorialization of a history"—a territorial tradition concretized in the homeland. Territory serves as the receptacle of the past in the present. It encapsulates one's history in one's piece of territory regarded as the peoples' homeland whose boundaries were marked prior to the creation of the state:

> Territory is bounded space, that is, a very substantial, material,
> measurable, and concrete entity. ... (It) is also the product and indeed the
> expression of the psychological features of human groups (Gottman
> 1973:15).

Therefore, a territory by itself is a human construct which serves as the material basis in defining and redefining human, group, ethnic, and social relations. It is the source of one's social security, assistance, dependency, sociability, and intimacy. Territory assures the continuity of culture and endurance of collective memory of peoples. Moreover, it is in such piece of land that the nature and scope of social problems are persistently defined and solved. As such, the concepts of space and territory are of fundamental importance in ensuring the tenacity of one's identity and survival as a people.

Evidently, territory binds people in order to fulfill the universal need to be rooted, to be anchored in space. It is the economic base of the community, the arena of social life, and the basis of the peoples' politico-cultural identity.

Nevertheless, the limited control exercised by indigenous people over their homeland stems from the non-recognition of the state of their right to communal ownership to their lands. In fact land is viewed as a commodity, i.e., a measurable entity, divisible into thing-like "parcels" which can be bought and sold by individual owners. This notion, evidently, is in line with the capitalist economic thought that land is a factor of production which interplays within the production-consumption pattern of the cash-market economic system.

This is contrary to the concept of land among the minorities and ethnic communities who see land as central within the circle of life. For them land is life. It is the central determinant of the lifeways of the people. From the interweaving of land and life for the indigenous peoples, consequently follows that the loss of rights to land is a threat to the survival of their race and culture.

The fundamental belief that land is a life-sustaining resource has effectively brought together ethnic groups and minorities in confronting the authoritarian-developmentalist state. The non-recognition of their right to their ancestral domain (territory) is perceived as a violation of the right to self-determination.

For the indigenous people and inhabitants of forest ranges, capitalist-styled development and modernization, presented as development-projects, have eroded their resource base (renewable and non-renewable), ejected them from their traditional homelands and threatened their cultural identity, economic stability, and political power over the affairs of their own domain.

The relentless problem of the minorities and ethnic communities on the issue of control over their territories and homelands including the resources found therein led them to raise the question of sovereignty. This is apart from their incessant demand for the international recognition of the right to self-determination.

The clamor for sovereign powers and rights of indigenous people to have politico-territorial controls over their domain is understandable inasmuch as they are bound by a shared concern for caring human-land relationships and by the lack of control over their lives.

What is being zealously desired by the minorities of all states is the transfer of power from the center to themselves so that they can have full control over their future in the lands they hold or claim.

The quest for local autonomy and self-determination for the ethnic minorities is therefore a matter of survival.

### Relativity of Values

Corollary to collective rights is the relativity of values. As early as 1947 when the UN Commission on Human Rights was still in the process of framing the Universal Declaration, the American Anthropological Association (AAA) had already questioned the universal application of human rights in complete disregard to the right of people to live within the confines of their own cultures and traditions. In essence, human rights need to be applied with due respect to the rights of people who choose to be different.

The AAA posited that the individual realizes one's personality through one's culture, hence respecting a person implies respecting one's culture. Similarly, a respect of individual differences entails a respect for cultural differences. Thus, endorsing a single cultural standard for the entire humanity where all rights of man have to be framed, invariably, poses a grave threat to the survival of other cultures whose peoples' rights are better exercised collectively rather than individually:

> ... standards and values are relative to the culture from which they derive so that any attempt to formulate postulates that grow out of the beliefs or moral codes of one culture must to that extent, detract from the

applicability of any Declaration of Human Rights to mankind as a whole
(American Anthropological Association Executive Board cited in
Stavenhagan 1991:57).

Conspicuously, the application of standards embodying the values of only one
culture over other cultures is indeed an affront to the latter. There is an implied
concept of "universality" of culture which is assumed to work for all societies as
opposed to the universalism of the earlier philosophical systems of thought.

Apparently, the fundamental assumptions of democracy must be redefined.
It must not only guarantee the democratic rights of the majority but assure the
minority of their rights to differ from the majority. These are without any
obligation on the part of the former to yield their rights and abide by the
decisions, policies, and rules set forth by the latter when such endanger or cause
the erosion of identity and survival of ethnic groups. Otherwise, the minority
would simply be persecuted by the majority.

The persistence of a mosaic of ethnic groups who operate in accordance with
their own rules and perseveres in their legitimate rights to self-governance either
outside or within the realm of the State is slowly giving rise to "mosaic
democracy" as distinguished from mass democracy. Mosaic democracy appears to
correspond to the mosaics in the economy and diversified or "de-massified"
peoples' needs and political demands.

## Final Note

Democracies as well as governmental structures have to tolerate the widest
possible diversity so long as the political system remains equilibrial. In a similar
vein, constitutional framework and development strategies *apropos* in fostering
cultural pluralism have to be discovered *sui generis* in each case.

Unfortunately, the world political and economic landscape defined by
seemingly impregnable capitalism does not provide the opportunity for a mosaic
democracy to thrive. Obviously, the creation of such democracy ultimately lies in
the hands of the most oppressed and exploited people of the world. And the
struggle remains to be pursued ... and won.

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