

Reclaiming the Community as the Site of Development Planning¹

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The paper considers the issues of Cordillera regional autonomy, democracy, and community participation in development planning. It builds on the findings and recommendations of previous studies on indigenous Cordillera political institutions and regional autonomy. As such, it highlights works published by UP Baguio's Cordillera Studies Center (CSC). It pays special attention to two (2) publications, namely, June Prill-Brett's *Tradition and Transformation: Studies on Cordillera Indigenous Culture*, and Athena Lydia Casambre's *Discourses on Cordillera Autonomy*, a collection of papers discussing the failed attempts in 1990 and 1998 to establish regional autonomy in the Cordillera. It problematizes Casambre's argument for the rejection of previous regional autonomy proposals and draws out the conclusion that follows from her reasoning. The paper argues that Cordillera autonomy would be best expressed or achieved, not by establishing an autonomous regional governmental body, but by recognizing, upholding, or (re)strengthening the autonomy of the *ili*, that is, the Cordillera village or community.

This paper contains my reflections on Cordillera regional autonomy, democracy, and community participation in development planning. It builds on the findings and recommendations of previous studies on indigenous Cordillera political institutions and regional autonomy. As such, it highlights works published by the Cordillera Studies Center (CSC), the research center of the University of the Philippines Baguio. It pays special attention to two (2) publications, namely, June Prill-Brett's *Tradition and Transformation: Studies on Cordillera Indigenous Culture*, an anthology of writings on Cordillera culture, customary law, and institutions which came out in 2015, and Athena Lydia Casambre's *Discourses on Cordillera Autonomy*, a collection of papers discussing the failed attempts in 1990 and 1998 to establish regional autonomy in the Cordillera which saw publication as a book in 2010.

The post-Marcos political situation in the Philippines in the late 1980s provided the backdrop for most of the papers in the aforementioned books. Ferdinand Marcos' ouster in 1986 ushered in the adoption of a new Philippine Constitution in 1987 which specifically provides for the creation of autonomous regions in Mindanao and the Cordilleras (Sec 1, Art X, Philippine Constitution). In line with the pursuit of Cordillera regional autonomy, Philippine Congress passed Republic Act (RA) 6766 (An Act Providing for the Cordillera Autonomous Region) in 1989, and RA 8438 (An Act to Establish the Cordillera Autonomous Region) in 1997, but the autonomous region of the Cordilleras was never established. The organic acts that were enacted to pave the way for Cordillera regional autonomy failed to muster ratification in two separate plebiscites. RA 6766 and RA 8438 were rejected on 30 January 1990 and 7 March 1998, respectively.

Casambreattributes the rejection of the regional autonomy proposals to "the fact that Cordillera natives' self-identity is anchored in their village. There was, and is, no pan-Cordillera identity" (Casambre 2010: 97). Casambre's claim is that the concept of a pan-Cordillera/regional political unit or community that transcends the village and effectively commands the loyalty of peoples in the Cordilleras is a novel construction that on the whole was not acceptable to majority of Cordillera

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natives as demonstrated by the non-ratification of the two autonomy proposals. Autonomy was traditionally exercised in the Cordillera but only at the level of the village, and not at the level of the region.

This observation was also expressed by Prill-Brett when she wrote: "The largest traditional political unit in the Cordillera is the *ili* (equivalent to village; also called *buble* or *sinbudong*).... These *ili* are autonomous socio-political units which traditionally control their own decision-making regarding village welfare and the control of their resources" (Prill-Brett 2015: 30-31). Casambre, in fact, echoes Prill-Brett when she highlighted the *ili*'s crucial and traditionally autonomous role vis-à-vis the major issues that confront the peoples of the Cordilleras, namely, (1) land ownership, (2) resource management, and (3) conflict resolution (Casambre 2010: 100; see Prill-Brett 2015: 1-26, 27-42).

It is important to note that the eminent scholar, William Henry Scott, also expressed this view in 1987 when he was quoted as saying:

The Cordillera is not a bloc... The Cordillera peoples have many things in common which they got from their geography... They are not themselves united and the reference to them as having been or will be united is probably unlikely.... In other words, there is going to be pluralism in the Cordillera. But that should not be seen as if there is not a Cordillera area and a common Cordillera interest ("There is going to be pluralism... 1987: 4).

As to the idea of Cordillera autonomy, William Henry Scott had this to say:

It is definitely true that the Cordillera maintains what was once true for the whole Philippines, mainly, that a valley or a barrio, or any one group, fights to defend themselves against aggression from the outside. In the lowlands, this was quite clear a long time ago. But here in the Cordillera, it has remained.... Yes, certainly, it's true that there is a warrior tradition in the Cordillera – but this is not the same thing as having a Cordillera army... In the Cordillera, people have a history of solving their own problems. They did not have an integrated national police; therefore, police power, as well as resistance to aggressors, was expressed locally... Any communal tradition in the Cordillera is highly localized. The Cordillera peoples were able to resist Spanish aggression village by village and valley by valley... (T)he (proposed) autonomous local government might take cognizance of local traditions like concepts of land ownership and access to natural resources, or traditional boundaries between communities. But local traditions in the Cordillera are precisely that – local. They are the traditional means by which disputes within a particular community are settled and crimes punished without recourse to law courts or codes established outside the community... ("There is going to be pluralism... 1987: 5-6).

If one follows and accepts Casambre's line of reasoning, one would arrive at an interesting conclusion: Cordillera autonomy would be best expressed or achieved, not by establishing an autonomous regional governmental body, but by recognizing, upholding, or (re)strengthening the autonomy of the *ili*, that is, the Cordillera village or community.

This paper explores the arguments for strengthening the *ili* as a community or political unit as a possible expression of Cordillera autonomy, particularly in relation to community development planning - that is, planning that involves the exploitation, development, and utilization of the community's natural resources.

It will proceed as follows. It will first attempt to clarify how key terms will be used in the paper. Afterwards, it will offer some background information on the Cordilleras and the call for regional autonomy. This will be followed by a brief discussion of the concept of “community” in the Cordilleras, and its link to the concept of “ancestral domain.” The modern-day *barangay* will then be described, alongside a discussion of some problems associated with the modern community. The latter part of the paper will dwell on the significance of “community” in political theory and the historical significance of the “community” in the Cordilleras. The paper will end by advancing the call for empowering Cordillera communities and Philippine barangays, in general. The paper essentially argues that empowering Cordillera barangays is the first step towards attaining autonomy in the Cordilleras.

On the Usage of Terms

The term “Cordilleras” and “Cordillera” will be used interchangeably in this paper. It bears noting that “Cordilleras” is the term used in the 1987 Constitution. Its usage tends to stress the point that the region and its communities are characterized by diversity in cultural practices, political arrangements, economic conditions, historical experiences, etc. Still, there is also value in using the term “Cordillera” to signify the intent to establish a united region or to highlight some commonalities in cultural heritage and historical experiences. In any case, “Cordillera” and “Cordilleras” refer to the area occupied by the present-day Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), which consists of the provinces of Abra, Apayao, Benguet, Ifugao, Kalinga, Mountain Province, and the City of Baguio.

The term “autonomy” as used in this paper refers to the concept as understood by scholars of politics. In this regard, Foldvary’s(2011) understanding of the concept is instructive. The etymology of the term suggests that “autonomy” is the ability or power to make laws (*nomos*) for oneself (*auto*). Autonomy is thus generally understood as the ability or power to make decisions for oneself; to rule or govern oneself; to pursue a self-chosen or self-determined course of action; or to be “not under the control of another” (Foldvary 2011: 853). Quite significantly, Foldvary warns that the term is easily mistaken for “independence.” He clarifies that autonomy is “often a political compromise between independence and complete integration” (Foldvary 2011: 854). In the field of international politics, the claim of “independence” is reserved for states while the “autonomy” of sub-state levels of government, regions, or local government units only refers to some limited degree of self-governance. In this paper, “autonomy” should not be taken to refer to the unrealistic state of complete independence from other political bodies or actors.

As for “community”, it is quite clear that the term has been defined in different ways and its usage is marked by imprecision. Zachary Neal (2012) identifies at least (3) general features that are almost always associated with the concept. He writes:

First, a community is a group of people who interact with one another, for example, as friends or neighbors. Second, this interaction is typically viewed as occurring within a bounded geographic territory, such as a neighborhood or city. Third, the community’s members often share common values, beliefs, or behaviors (Neal 2012).

Adopting Neal’s characterization of community, this paper understands community as having the basic characteristics of (1) (regular) interaction; (2) geographic boundedness; and (3) shared

common values, beliefs or behaviors. To these we can also add sharing (4) a strong sense of belonging, community spirit, or group feeling, and (5) a common culture. People who use the term “community” can therefore highlight various possible dimensions of the concept – e.g., interaction, territoriality, shared values, group feeling, culture, etc. The term can refer to a group of people who (a) interact regularly with one another; (b) live in the same geographic area; (c) share a strong sense of belonging – i.e., a community spirit or a group feeling; (d) share common values, beliefs, and interests; (e) are culturally similar, etc. People who use the term “community” can therefore highlight various possible dimensions of the concept – e.g., interactive/social, territorial, group feeling, shared values, cultural, etc.

That “community” can be defined in many different ways seems beneficial for this paper. As will be discussed below, the concept of “community” in the Cordilleras can have many meanings. For the specific purposes of this paper, the term “community” will generally refer a group of people at a very localized – i.e., grass-roots level. Oftentimes, it will generally refer to a group of people who reside in a section of a municipality or city. In many parts of the Cordilleras, as mentioned earlier, the traditional community is called the *ili*. The present-day community now is most likely a sitio, a barangay, or a group of contiguous barangays. In this paper, “community” is to be distinguished from the “town” or “city”, the “region”, and the “nation.”

Meanwhile, as mentioned earlier, “development planning” in this paper will be used to refer to the process of formulating plans or decisions that cover the exploitation, development, and utilization of natural resources found within the territory of the community. Please note that development here is used primarily in the context of economic development.

Background Information on the Cordilleras

The Cordillera occupies a landlocked mountainous region in the northern part of the Philippines. Currently an administrative region, the Cordillera consists of six (6) provinces, namely, Abra, Apayao, Benguet, Ifugao, Kalinga, and Mountain Province; and the City of Baguio.

Occupying an area of not more 20,000 square kilometers, it currently holds a population which is estimated to be around 1.7 million. It is home to a number of indigenous peoples/indigenous cultural communities, among them the Bontok, Ibaloy, Ifugao, Isneg, Kalinga, Kankana-ey, and Tingguian. Various indigenous languages, with their local variants, are spoken in the Cordillera. These include Bontok, Ibaloy, Kankana-ey, Kalahan, Kalinga, Ifugao, Gaddang, Isneg, and Tingguian. Ilocano however is the *lingua franca*, the language used for trading and business.

The Call for Regional Autonomy in the Cordilleras

While rich in natural resources, the region has persistently been plagued by poverty and underdevelopment. Available data on Human Development Index (HDI) scores of Philippine provinces seem to support this claim (see Table 1 in page 6). If one sets aside the HDI of the province of Benguet which topped the list in 2008/2009, one finds that the other five (5) Cordillera provinces have scores that fall below the Philippine average of 0.633.

Table 1. Table on 2008/2009 HDI Scores of Philippine Provinces

Rank	Name of Province	HDI	Rank	Name of Province	HDI
1	Benguet	0.883	37	Guimaras	0.532
2	Metro Manila (region)	0.837	38T	Camiguin	0.531
3	Batanes	0.820	38T	Nueva Ecija	0.531
4	Ilocos Norte	0.813	40	Apayao	0.529
5	Rizal	0.763	41	Davao del Norte	0.526
6	Cavite	0.737	42T	Albay	0.518
7T	Bataan	0.726	42T	Cotabato	0.518
7T	Bulacan	0.726	44	Palawan	0.517
9	Laguna	0.723	45	Bukidnon	0.514
10	Nueva Vizcaya	0.705	46	Antique	0.513
11	Pampanga	0.659	47	Sorsogon	0.512
12T	Batangas	0.657	48	Camarines Sur	0.511
12T	Cagayan	0.657	49T	Abra	0.508
14T	Aurora	0.655	49T	Southern Leyte	0.508
14T	Biliran	0.655	51T	Bohol	0.501
16	Misamis Oriental	0.650	51T	Quezon	0.501
17	Iloilo	0.643	53T	Misamis Occidental	0.496
18T	La Union	0.640	53T	Oriental Mindoro	0.496
18T	Quirino	0.640	55	Siquijor	0.489
20	South Cotabato	0.636	56	Camarines Norte	0.488
-	Philippines average	0.633	57	Ifugao	0.483
21	Catanduanes	0.630	58	Samar	0.480
22	Isabela	0.627	59T	Aklan	0.478
23	Davao del Sur	0.626	59T	Basilan	0.478
24	Zambales	0.624	61	Eastern Samar	0.468
25T	Cebu	0.605	62	Sultan Kudarat	0.466
25T	Ilocos Sur	0.605	63	Surigao del Norte	0.460
27	Tarlac	0.596	64T	Mountain Province	0.449
28	Leyte	0.588	64T	Northern Samar	0.449
29	Pangasinan	0.578	66	Romblon	0.445
30	Marinduque	0.565	67	Lanao del Sur	0.432
31T	Agusan del Norte	0.562	68	Masbate	0.422
31T	Kalinga	0.562	69	Zamboanga del Norte	0.399
33T	Lanao del Norte	0.558	70	Sarangani	0.386
33T	Negros Occidental	0.558	71	Davao Oriental	0.370
35	Occidental Mindoro	0.550	72	Agusan del Sur	0.368
36	Capiz	0.543	73	Tawi-Tawi	0.322

Source: Philippine Human Development Network (HDN) (2008/2009) Provinces and Human Development.

The need for sustainable development and poverty reduction have been cited by advocates as the main reasons for establishing regional autonomy in the Cordilleras (DPEG 2014: 4). In fact, House Bill No. 5343, the latest regional autonomy proposal emanating from the Lower House of Congress, acknowledges that “the only way to drastically address **underdevelopment** and **poverty** in the

Cordilleras would be through regional autonomy” (HB 5343 2017: 2; emphasis added). In any case, Table 1 above provides some support to the claim of underdevelopment and poverty in the region.

The Concept of “Community” in the Cordilleras

Appearing to be culturally distinct from neighboring lowland populations, practices and political institutions in the Cordilleras are nonetheless group-specific, place-specific, and time-specific. What follows below is a discussion about the conceptions of community among Cordillera groups. The reader is advised to bear in mind that it is difficult to make sweeping generalizations about the cultural practices and political institutions in Cordillera communities.

People in the Cordillera, in general, identified with their village (*ili*), as mentioned earlier, or with their kinship group, and/or (ethnic) “region.” Again, there was no identification with a political organization or community that was as large as the present-day Cordillera Administrative Region. “Community” was experienced at the grass-roots level, and not at the larger regional level.

Cordillera peoples traditionally lived in more or less autonomous communities. The largest traditional political unit – i.e., political community – among the Bontok, Kankana-ey and Tingguian was called the *ili* (Prill-Brett 1988: 10). *Ili* membership or citizenship is acquired through (a) birth, (b) marriage, and (c) residence. Rights and obligations are conferred to citizens of the *ili*.

Among the Kalinga, the ethnic “region” is the largest recognized geographical unit. In northern Kalinga, the “region” is referred to as “boboloy.” The “region” refers to a specified area where closely related kin intermarried with outsiders and carried on their economic activities. A region is occupied by individuals who are either related by blood or marriage. In the past, the region and kinship were identical in the thinking of the Kalingas (Dozier 1966: 55). Quite significantly, Prill-Brett (2015: 30, citing Barton 1949; Bacdayan 1967; and De Raedt 1969) says that “Kalinga communities are characterized as belonging to a region.”

Among the Ifugao, the agricultural district serves as the functional territorial unit. Ifugao hamlets are generally “dispersed within or near a clustered series of irrigated terraces belonging to one “*puntanaan*” (ritual field) (Prill-Brett 1988: 8). The Ifugao share the Kalinga notion of the region as an area occupied by members of the kinship group. Accordingly, we can infer that the Ifugao region is similarly made up of communities.

It bears noting here that the Cordillera notion of “community” involves the idea of geographic boundedness, of territory and its boundaries.² Moreover, it involves the idea of a dichotomy between an insider, *anumili* (i.e. a citizen or member of the community), and an outsider (i.e., a non-citizen or non-member of the community). Ethnographic accounts – e.g. Prill-Brett 1988, etc. – show that community membership was associated with the performance of certain duties and obligations

²Although Prill-Brett (2015: 19) cautions that some Cordillera groups have a more developed notion of territory than others. She writes: “Among the Cordillera groups..., there is an absence of reference to territory and boundaries (in relation to political jurisdiction) among the Isneg, Tingguian, and Ifugao. However, **there is mention of the political unit which is the settlement or hamlet**, although there is no reference in the literature as to the extent to which political jurisdiction regarding territorial space is defined. Thus, it would appear **that the concept of territory has not yet been well-developed**, or else this subject has been a neglected area of inquiry (Prill-Brett 2015: 19; emphasis added).

to the community, alongside the enjoyment of certain rights and privileges, including the right to access some natural resource found within the community's territory, as will be discussed below. Moreover, these accounts indicate the sharing of beliefs and practices within communities. Needless to say, the ethnographic accounts also highlight the unavoidable social interaction of community members. Hence, there are reasons to believe that the *ili* of the Bontok, Kankana-ey, and Tingguian, and the "region" of the Kalinga and Ifugao qualify as "communities" - as earlier defined - because ethnographic accounts – e.g. Prill-Brett 1988; Dozier 1966, etc. - indicate that they meet the basic criteria of (1) interaction; (2) geographic boundedness; and, (3) shared common values, beliefs or behaviors.

Traditional political authority in the Cordillera was either exercised collectively by a council of elders or individually by leaders who acted as protectors of their kinship group and/or guardians of their region's interests. Traditionally, no political authority, council, or government was recognized as exercising authority over the entire region and over all Cordillera groups. As mentioned previously, decision-making at the level of the *ili* covered the most important aspects of village life, namely, land ownership, resource management, and conflict resolution.

Prill-Brett (2015: 32), meanwhile, specifies that Cordillera communities understand "natural resources" as including the following:

1. forest and forest products
2. water from mountain springs for household and irrigation purposes
3. rivers for fishing, ritual performance, and irrigation
4. swidden land for food production
5. pasture land for grazing carabaos and cows
6. mineral land for the extraction of gold
7. clay for local pottery
8. terraced land for rice production
9. residential

Utilization of the aforementioned types of natural resources were governed by customary rules and notions of rights recognized by the community and enforced by traditional community decision-makers.

Now, I have argued elsewhere (see Ciencia 1996, echoing Zialcita 1989) that the customary rules, dispute-resolution processes, and the notions of justice of Cordillera peoples reflected their religious ideas, economic practices, and political beliefs. Their performance of rituals and reliance on trials by ordeal, omens (e.g. the examination of a chicken's entrails; see Prill-Brett 2015: 4), and oaths (e.g. *sapata*) reflected their belief in spirits or deities who oversaw human affairs. Political beliefs involving the notions of authority, community, citizenship (or community membership), and intervillage diplomacy shaped how they resolved inter- and intra-village conflicts. Meanwhile, their conceptions of land rights (see Prill-Brett 2015) clearly had a bearing on how they understood and resolved land disputes.

At any rate, it appears that Aranal-Sereno and Libarios' (1933: 437) observation about the Kalinga concept of land - that "it is built on a complex but coherent body of customs, traditions, beliefs and practices" – also applies to other Cordillera groups. The Cordillera peoples' political, economic, and religious beliefs may be seen as constituting a holistic, interrelated, and coherent system. Again, the actual customary rules governing the use of natural resources were place-specific, group-specific, and time-specific, but it is generally accepted that the "grass-roots" *ilior* the traditional Cordillera community played a central role in the survival, well-being, and identity of Cordillera peoples.

It needs to be stressed at this point that the traditional Cordillera village or community exercised autonomy not only in relation to conflict resolution, but also economic decision-making. Prill-Brett (2015: 31) cites the role of community leaders in planning the "performance of community rituals and socio-economic activities." She writes: "These *ili* are autonomous socio-political units which traditionally control their own decision-making regarding village welfare and **the control of their resources**" (Prill-Brett 2015: 31; emphasis added). Discussing decision-making in a Bontok *ili*, she writes: "(t)raditionally, no superior authority controlling judicial and **economic processes** within the village exists outside of the judicial or **economic processes** within it" (Prill-Brett 2015: 5; emphasis added). The elders, "when gathered as a single body..., **schedule the agricultural calendar, declaring the 'rest' days, 'work' days, and community welfare ceremonies**" (Prill-Brett 2015: 6; emphasis added). The Kankana-ey elders, called *lakay* or *amam-a*, have the similar function of "prescribing the holding of feasts when necessary" (Prill-Brett 2015: 21), while the traditional leaders of the Isneg, the *kamenglan*, have the responsibility of "maintaining the balance of the economy" (Prill-Brett 2015: 22).

Moreover, and quite importantly, Prill-Brett notes the existence in (at least some) Cordillera communities of certain checks against possible abuse³ by powerful individuals in the community. Prill-Brett (citing Moss 1920) writes: "The (Ibaloy) *baknang*'s⁴ power is almost absolute, and it extends over a number of communities where he owns rice fields and cattle. However, the authority of the *baknang* is not unlimited, for the *tongtong*⁵ could check the power of a *baknang* through the *tongtong* council" (Prill-Brett 2015: 2).

The point here is that traditional Cordillera communities enjoyed autonomy at the village level. The customary laws that governed life in the Cordillera communities may be regarded as constituting a coherent system of rules that reflected the political, economic, and religious beliefs of their citizens. Moreover, one can identify aspects of traditional community life that served as checks against possible abuse by some powerful community members. Belief in just deities or spirits, among others, served as a powerful check. Traditional Cordillera communities enjoyed village-level autonomy, and their autonomy militated against the establishment of a pan-Cordillera/regional identity and government.

Community and Ancestral Domain

³If Durkheim was right in his characterization of mechanical and organic solidarity, egoistic/self-interested behavior by members of indigenous communities did not occur in pre-modern societies because community norms prevented the expression of such behavior, safeguarding in the process the collective well-being.

⁴Person belonging to the wealthy class.

⁵Council of elders.

It is important to mention that the concept of community, territory, and autonomy in the Cordillera is inseparable from the concept of ancestral domain. Note here that the concept of ancestral domain entails autonomy in community economic decision-making or, for the specific purpose of this paper, development planning. Describing the concept, Prill-Brett (2015: 27) writes:

Ancestral domain is a concept applied to the territory occupied and recognized by an indigenous group since time immemorial, long before the existence of the Philippine Republic. The concept of ancestral domain includes (a) the indigenous people's right to avail themselves of the direct benefits derived from the exploitation of resources within their territories, and (b) the right to directly decide how land, water, and other resources will be allocated, used, or managed.

Now, it bears stressing here that the Cordillera communities' concepts of ancestral domain and land rights, which includes rights to various types of natural resources, are intimately linked to their survival. Autonomous economic decision-making or development planning was crucial to the survival of the traditional community.

The Present-Day Barangay

Now, the traditional *ili* has mostly been replaced by the *barangay*, the smallest administrative or political unit of the modern Philippine state. It bears noting that in the Cordilleras the modern-day barangay does not necessarily correspond to the traditional "community." As Prill-Brett (2015: 31) reports, "(a)t present, some of the *ili* have decided to split into two or more barangays due to population increase, often with the purpose of gaining support from the national government for community projects such as barangay roads, clinics, schools, and bridges."

Moreover, the establishment of a Philippine state and "the superimposition of national government political institutions has weakened the indigenous political leaders' status in the community" (Prill-Brett 2015: 25, echoing Madale's (1973's) comment on the weakening of the traditional Isneg leader, the *mengel*). The Philippine state's establishment has resulted in the diminution of the indigenous political institutions and practices, and the disappearance of traditional community autonomy.

Still, it can be argued that the modern barangay actually has enhanced powers, especially after the adoption of the 1987 Philippine Constitution and the enactment of the Local Government Code of 1991. The barangay, under the 1987 Charter, is an example of a **territorial and political subdivision**, alongside provinces, cities, and municipalities (Sec.1, Art. X). The Constitution provides that as a political subdivision, the barangay "shall enjoy local autonomy" (Sec. 2, Art. X). The barangay is also considered a local government unit under the general supervision of the Philippine President. As such, it has the "power to create its own sources of revenues and to levy taxes, fees, and charges... (which) shall accrue exclusively to the local governments" (Sec. 5, Art. X); it "shall have a just share... in the national taxes which shall be automatically released to them" (Sec. 6, Art. X); and, it "shall be entitled to an equitable share in the proceeds of the utilization and development of the national wealth within (its) respective (area), in the manner provided by law, including sharing the same with

the inhabitants by way of direct benefits (Sec. 7, Art. X). The Local Government Code primarily serves as the implementing law of these constitutional provisions, effectively strengthening or empowering the post-American period *barangay*. One can further argue that with the passage of other laws, like the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA), the modern community in the Cordilleras has considerable powers that were non-existent in the traditional *ili*.

This paper will however argue that the modern-day political arrangements or practices, many of them apparently originally well-intentioned, have not actually produced a strengthened *barangay*. These have supplanted or contributed to the neglect of the concept of "community", resulting in unfavorable consequences for peoples of the Cordilleras.

The paper offers three (3) general arguments. The main argument is that the pertinent legislative measures (e.g. the Local Government Code and the IPRA) and new political arrangements, while aimed at enhancing the powers of the *barangay*, have failed to take into account the absorptive capacity (and the requisite qualifications) of local leaders and populations to derive maximum benefits from the exercise of their enhanced powers. The Local Government Code, for instance, has assigned new powers and responsibilities to local community/*barangay* leaders but studies show that such leaders lack the requisite capabilities, know-how, and mindset to effectively perform their new functions. A secondary - and less important - argument is the assertion that the national government was not totally committed to providing local government units, including *barangays*, with the needed financial support for community leaders to perform new responsibilities assigned by the Local Government Code.

A third argument is the claim that pertinent legislative measures and government policies only provided modern political actors – i.e., individuals and groups – with incentives to engage in strategic, gain-seeking behaviors which, with the disappearance of Durkheim's mechanical solidarity – i.e., the collective orientation of pre-modern societies, results in the distortion of the well-intentioned (yet naïve) measures. The point is that the autonomy-preserving and autonomy-enhancing features of traditional Cordillera communities – i.e., the coherent mix of political, economic, and religious beliefs and practices mentioned earlier – were the product of the natural evolution of community practices as traditional *ilis* responded to endogenous and exogenous forces in their communities and environments. The *barangay*, as a modern-day superimposition, and given the influx of conflicting and confusing mix of political, economic, and religious beliefs and practices, and the emergence of modern-day strategic, gain-seeking behaviors, lacks the adaptability of the *ili* in its traditional setting.

In their study of *barangay* financing, Layug, *et al.* (2010: 1) specifically found, among others, that "there is a mismatch between financial capabilities and devolved functions owing to limited funds spent mostly on personal services, with little money left to finance these functions." Quite interestingly, they recommended that *barangays* allow "higher LGUs to deliver the development-enhancing services such as education and health that they themselves cannot deliver effectively and sustainably" (Layug, *et al.* 2010: 1), highlighting the observation that some important functions devolved to *barangays* clearly did not match the capabilities of their leaders.

Quite recently, Layug, *et al.*'s finding on the limited funds of barangays was reiterated by a Baguio City councilor who proposed the infusion of additional funds from the city government to the barangays to hasten their development. The news report notes that "(f)or being dependent on the Internal Revenue Allotment share (from the national government), barangays have barely enough for its honoraria for barangay officials, manpower and operation and have always clamored for bigger development funds from the city government" ("More funds..." 2010; 29).

Incidentally, another recent news report indicated that all along the Philippine national government not really been generous in allocating the much needed funds to barangays for it had been withholding

additional and much needed funds that would have increased the Internal Revenue Allotment of local government units (LGUs). On 11 April 2019, the Philippine Supreme Court was reported as ruling that "that the IRA of LGUs should include tariff and duties collected by the Bureau of Customs, 50 percent of value-added tax, 30 percent of national taxes collected in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, 60 percent of national taxes collected from the exploitation and development of national wealth, 85 percent of excise tax from tobacco products and a portion of franchise tax under Republic Acts 6631 and 6632 (Horse Racing Laws), among others" ("It's final..." 2019).

Cielito Habito, in his column on 10 May 2019, raised the point that the barangay may, in fact, be the "spark" for development" in the Philippines, not only among indigenous communities, but for all Philippine barangays (Habito 2019). He writes:

What if we gave each of our 42,044 barangays 335 bags of cement each, and let the residents of each of them collectively decide how to use them, while providing the labor themselves? What if one man and one woman are elected in each barangay to lead in planning and implementing projects identified by the community? What if one year later, we reward the barangays that made good use of that cement with another 500 bags of cement, plus steel bars to use with them as reinforcement, again with the same conditions? What if sustained and systematic training is provided to the men and women leaders of all the barangays, to impart the right developmental values, know-how and skills for impelling their communities into collective action for the common good? What if the barangays' performance is regularly monitored and evaluated so that each of them can find out how they have fared relative to their peers, thereby fostering a friendly competition among them to try and outdo one another in doing good? (Habito 2019).

Insisting that his questions are not hypothetical, Habito reports that South Korea's impressive rapid development since the 1970s can be attributed to a nationwide movement called "SaemulUndong" which essentially involved the infusion of funds to stimulate rural development, coupled with the training of community leaders, the provision of incentives, the promotion of competition among villages, and the regular monitoring and evaluation of community projects. Habito is thus arguing that the barangay can, in fact, be meaningfully empowered to be progressive in its orientation.

At this point, I would like to draw attention to some interesting observations made by scholars of indigenous/Cordillera societies. Writing on the implementation of the IPRA in its first ten years of implementation, Augusto Gatmaytan (2007) commented that the IPRA had "bureaucratized" local land and resource use. He writes:

Less than a lifetime ago, an indigenous farmer intent on supporting her/his family would simply have walked into the forest to work. In an area covered by a CADT however, our hypothetical farmer would have to ensure that his/her plans are consistent with the area's Ancestral Domains

Sustainable Development and Protection Plan (ADSDPP) required by the IPRA (Gatmaytan 2007: 19).

To me, Gaymaytan's comment raises the question of whether the IPRA indeed promotes autonomy among indigenous peoples, or simply promotes the mindless subservience to state requirements. Meanwhile, Prill-Brett (2015: 172) discusses how the operation of state law alongside that of custom has allowed some individuals and groups to take advantage of the discrepancy between the two systems "for their own ends." Legal pluralism, as one consequence of the enactment of legal measures and policies, has encouraged strategic, gain-seeking behaviors.⁶The national government's preference for individual paper titling, Prill-Brett (2015: 40) notes, threatens the peoples of the Cordillera with landlessness by encouraging the titling of common property among Cordillera communities.

Another disturbing development was the tendency of the national government to award "a CADC (certificate of ancestral domain claim) over an entire administrative area (i.e., a municipality or a province) [which has] no fit with any traditional regional mechanism for managing such an ancestral domain" (Prill-Brett 2015: 176). Apparently, the demands of efficiency impelled government to award large areas to particular Cordillera groups. But as the process was hardly anthropologically-informed, such governmental actions only resulted in land disputes, "inequity among indigenous community members," if not the unsustainable use of community resources (Prill-Brett 2015: 181-182). To avoid these complications, the concepts of ancestral domain and community must go hand in hand.

The need to periodically revisit and amend the definition of "community" to satisfy the spirit of community decision-making was also noted by Calde, Ciencia, and Rovillos (2013), in their study of the implementation of the Free and Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) requirement of the IPRA. Their study recommended that the concept of "affected community" must also consider not only the directly affected communities, but also others indirectly impacted, including "upstream and downstream communities, IPs and non-IPs, and migrant IPs" (Calde, Ciencia, and Rovillos 2013: 58).

To summarize this section, there are compelling arguments for empowering the community. Doing so should seriously take into account the community's autonomy. While re-establishing traditional autonomy or the traditional *ili* is highly unlikely, there are reasons to believe that the modern day barangay can be further empowered by assigning to it the functions that its leaders are capable of doing; by augmenting its funds; and, by periodically revisiting and amending the laws and policies that fail to meet the spirit of indigenous community empowerment.

As can be gleaned from the foregoing, the paper also argues for the empowerment of all Philippine communities/barangays. In communities/barangays where custom law still prevails, it is recommended that these communities be allowed to practice the functions traditionally assigned to them – most probably, the settling of land disputes, the setting of the agricultural calendar, the setting of rules governing the utilization of resources within the community, etc. In previously traditional communities where custom law is no longer used, the idea of democracy and community autonomy demand that the community be allowed to decide for itself how it will exercise its decision-making powers.

⁶Prill-Brett (2015: 171-189) offers examples of these in her paper "Contested Domains: The Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) and Legal Pluralism."

Reclaiming the Community

The position of the paper then is not to “bring back” the traditional community – as it existed in the past - for that would be impossible. Instead, it argues for a more realistic assignment of barangay functions that seriously aims to match the capabilities of barangay leaders and their constituents; the sincere allocation of funds to the barangay; and, the periodic reevaluation and redefinition of “community” – as contained in laws and governmental policies - through the process of community/public deliberation, in response to forces of change in modern society, and in line with the idea of democracy, as will be discussed below.

The Significance of “Community”

The concept of “community is essential to democratic theory and practice despite the tendency of modern-day advocates of liberal democracy to downplay its significance. With their emphasis on protecting individual rights and liberties, liberal democrats have shown little interest in recognizing the idea and ideal of “community.”

In the field of political philosophy, the 18th century Genevan, Jean Jacques Rousseau, offered a rather convincing account of the community’s significance and its direct link to the establishment of a just government, especially when the community is the locus of grassroots level decision-making and direct democracy. For Rousseau, a just government is one that is able to protect persons, including their goods and freedoms, while uniting them as members of a community. A just government is marked by the exercise of “double capacity” (Rousseau 1994: 57) by its citizens – that is, the citizen or individual has (1) the capacity of a **subject** (or follower) as a member of the community, and (2) the capacity of a **sovereign** (or decision-maker) as part of a democratic community that makes laws and policies for its members to follow. For Rousseau, the exercise of double capacity ensures that government will be responsive to the needs and protective of the welfare of community members because the community as a collective decision-making body will not be inclined to make decisions that are detrimental to its individual members. Community-made laws would uphold the general will, serve the interests of the community, and protect their well-being as citizens. As citizens who actively participate in the making of laws, they will not pursue the enactment of measures that will be detrimental to their interests as individuals. Put differently, the community is less likely to be unjust or oppressive when it depends on itself to make decisions that will bear on the lives of its members – i.e., when it exercises self-government or autonomy - than when it relies on the decision-making of a faction or outsiders.

It bears noting that David Held (2006) classifies Rousseau as a proponent of **developmental republicanism** whose key features include the active participation of citizens in public assemblies for the purpose of law-making and the desirability for the community to arrive at unanimity when addressing public issues (Held 2006 : 8). Note too that among the conditions for establishing developmental republicanism is the existence of a “small, non-industrial community” (Held 2006: 8). The direct and active participation of citizens in community decision-making is more likely to develop and flourish in small-sized communities.

To my mind, Rousseau's political philosophy provides a compelling argument for "bringing back" the community in present-day politics, particularly in the Cordilleras. But apart from those rooted in political philosophy, one can also find anthropological and historical arguments for "bringing back" or "empowering" the community in the lives of people in the Cordilleras.

Historical Significance of Community in the Cordilleras

The clamor for autonomy in the Cordilleras has cultural and historical roots. Attempts to establish regional autonomy in the Cordilleras were clearly a response to the "developmental" efforts of the Philippine state. The construction of the Chico Dam in the 1960s(2)/1970s, which threatened to inundate a number of villages in Kalinga and the Mt. Province, and the eventual assassination of Kalinga leader and dam opposer, Macli-ing Dulag, by elements of the Philippine military, mobilized inhabitants and activists against the dam and against the Marcos government which sought its construction without the consent of the affected communities (see Doyo 2015; and Finin 2005).

For its proponents, particularly in the 1980s, regional autonomy was the answer to the Philippine state's tendency to pay little attention to the will, interests, and welfare of people in the Cordilleras. For its proponents in the last ten years, regional autonomy was presented as the solution to the problems of underdevelopment and poverty in the Cordilleras.

Elinor Ostrom

At this point, I would just like to reiterate the point of community empowerment by citing Elinor Ostrom's work. Ostrom's (1991) research on the management of common-pool resources (CPR) demonstrates that under certain conditions communities can sustainably manage their resources and avoid the "Tragedy of the Commons." Ostrom identified the shared institutional characteristics of communities that have managed to maintain enduring and self-governing common-pool institutions. These are:

1. Individuals or households who have rights to withdraw resource units from the CPR must be clearly defined, as must the boundaries of the CPR itself
2. Appropriation rules restricting time, place, technology, and/or quantity of resource units are related to local conditions and to provision rules requiring labor, materials, and/or money
3. Most individuals affected by the operational rules can participate in modifying the operational rules
4. Monitors, who actively audit CPR conditions and appropriator behavior, are accountable to the appropriators or are the appropriators
5. Appropriators who violate operational rules are likely to be assessed graduated sanctions (depending on the seriousness and context of offense) by other appropriators, by officials accountable to these appropriators, or by both
6. Appropriators and their officials have rapid access to low-cost local arenas to resolve conflicts among appropriators or between appropriators and officials
7. The rights of appropriators to devise their own institutions are not challenged by external authorities
8. Appropriation, provision, monitoring, enforcement, conflict resolution, and governance activities are organized in multiple layers of nested enterprises (Ostrom 1991: 156-178).

In short, Ostrom supports the assertion that communities can sustainably manage common resources, albeit under certain conditions. Her ideas seem consistent with some of the points highlighted by Habito – e.g., periodic monitoring and evaluation, the provision of incentives, and the provision of ample financial support.

Conclusion

Scholars – eg. Prill-Brett and Casambre - have consistently highlighted the importance of the community in the lives of people in the Cordilleras. That the community is at the center or a core component of a Cordilleran's sense of identity, of his/her loyalties, political consciousness, and sense of justice, etc. has been noted by many scholars on the Cordillera. Intriguingly, however, previous and recent attempts by Filipino political actors and advocates to establish autonomy in the region seem to ignore this important point. Building on the works of scholars on the Cordillera, this paper argues that for an autonomy project to succeed in the Cordilleras it needs to explicitly incorporate Cordillera communities in policy formulation and implementation processes, particularly in the making of economic decisions that affect the community or development planning. The paper has also argued that the empowerment of communities in the Cordilleras is an essential ingredient in establishing autonomy in the region, whether this involves the adoption of a federal system of government or the creation of a regional government.

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