

# **SOCIO-CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF A PROPOSED FEDERAL SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT IN THE PHILIPPINES**

By Mina M. Ramirez, PhD

**No system of government will work for a country as long as the intangible dimensions of people, politics and government – the inner person of the Filipino, the politician and culture – are not addressed. This is the basic postulate of this paper.**

The Philippines has had a centralized form of government under a presidential system since 1946 – practiced within a democratic framework. The main criterion of an effective system of government is the extent to which it serves its people in their basic needs – food, means of livelihood, health, education, housing and the observance of human rights (freedom of expression, of religion, of securing the future of children, etc) all based on the recognition of human dignity. The promotion of a life of dignity of all without exclusion and marginalization is the ultimate responsibility of leadership and governance. In whatever form this leadership and governance is practiced, there is a need of a continual education of people towards a sense of the common good in ever widening circles from the family, the community, the nation and the world. Such a social climate in the country is the guarantee of potential leaders of good repute – leaders ready to do public service.

This paper aims to lead us to a reflection of the basic facts of our socio-cultural history. From the socio-cultural contexts of our development as a people, we hope to discover both the socio-cultural supports for a federal system of government as well as the aspects of our socio-cultural reality and experience which we have to contend with when putting in place the new political democratic framework.

To put in place a federal system of government will demand from us the identification of role models of leaders with good reputation in serving the common good analytically describing in what manner they harnessed the positive elements of our socio-cultural reality in facilitating the individual and collective self-empowerment of sector(s)

in our society. Nothing can be more effective in educating people towards the common good than inspiring them to the shared vision of justice, peace and integrity of creation and skillful art and practice by identified living icons of public service that have made systems work for the people.

**A corollary to the basic postulate of the paper is – a need to do positive mapping of local government people who have within their spheres of influence practiced a decentralized form of governing, and were successful in giving honor to people’s aspirations and social initiatives having proven that decentralization draws out the best from our people<sup>1</sup> (nurturing in them their desire to contribute to a larger good instead of being overly concerned about their own personal advancement.**

In the light of the above perspective, I will organize this paper in the following manner:

- A. The Challenges Being Posed to our Leadership now – Social Issues  
& Positive Social Initiatives
- B. Learnings from Basic Social Facts of our Socio-Cultural History and Contexts
- C. The Desirability of Adopting the Principles of the Swiss Federal System of Government
- D. Positive mapping as a Participatory Research and Educational and Organizing Process in all Sectors – a Basis of Building the Human Infrastructure for a Federal System of Government.

### **A. The Challenges Posed by Social Issues and Positive Social Initiatives**

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<sup>1</sup> Devora, Grace Odal, “Exploring the ‘Mutya’ as a Way of Being and Becoming,” in Paul Dejillas (ed.) *In the Service of Spirituality, Culture and Development*. Manila, Philippines: MEGR, Design Print. 2001, pp. 104-122. (‘Mutya’ as a Conceptual Tool and Framework, as Program for Self, Community and Nation)

**The Challenge of the Dark Aspects of our Society..** The challenge posed to a more decentralized form of government through federalism is to what extent it would resolve more effectively the following social ills plaguing our country today:

- 58% of Filipinos are living in dire poverty.
- There are many divides: economic, political, social, cultural, digital.
- Enhancing the divide is: a regressive tax system, distorted salary scales, unequal distribution of resources, and institutional reinforcement of the divides.
- Intergenerational solidarity threatened by a growing population and an increasing number of the elderly, a small middle class that may still get impoverished and an inadequate social security system from which only about 25 million persons out of 85 million people are covered.
- Economic globalization operating on the principles of liberalization, privatization and deregulation of trade allowing for international market competition that is defeating to our ordinary Filipinos (especially our peasants) due to lack of technology, organizational capacity, and capital.

The Wallace Report of 2004, entitled, “Where To, the Philippines (Or, Does the Philippines Have a Chance,” identifies 10 issues that will have to be addressed at the same time if the Philippines will have to advance in the same way that our neighbors, Thailand and Malaysia – have been progressing. These issues are:

1. Politics – vested interest vs. national good.
2. Uncontrolled population growth
3. Weak educational system.
4. Corruption
5. Inadequate infrastructure
6. Agricultural system that has not improved in 30 years.
7. An inadequate focus on job creation.
8. A judiciary in need of major improvement.

9. Security

10. Good governance.

The questions to ask are: After fifty-three years of governance under a presidential democratic system of government, why is it that the Philippines Republic has failed to forge ahead of its Asian neighbors? With five hundred graduate schools in the country and about 200 universities, why have we not produced leaders who can put a stop to the culture of corruption? Yes, international studies have come up with the finding that Philippine Society is the 2<sup>nd</sup> in the practice of corruption in the world. To resolve our social ills will a federal form of government be more effective? The federal form of government is supposedly one that is more decentralized in operation.

Democracy under a presidential form of government has failed due to the fact that a significant number of our national leaders have not demonstrated that they have a sense of the common good at heart. It is true what the Wallace Report has said, the first problem is – vested interest vs. national good. The evidences of this mentality are all the structural imbalances (the “divides”) that we experience. An externalization of this mentality is the fact that monetary poverty stalks the country. Wage policies do not suffice in order to make people live decently<sup>2</sup>. This is aggravated by salary scales which are distorted creating wide gaps between top level management and the rank and file<sup>3</sup> In government corporations the gap between the top and the bottom is 52 steps. ---the lowest being about P9,000/month and the highest, being one hundred to four hundred pesos a month<sup>4</sup>. In terms of taxes, it is the fixed salaried rank and file people who are severely taxed. The high and the mighty can evade taxes through bribes or through manipulation of accounts. While doing a focus group discussion on who is the most honest president from 1986-2003 - in the country, conducted among seven representing the rank and file in our institute –security guards and those who are in the maintenance section - I was surprised that all seven in the group, said that all national presidents in the

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<sup>2</sup> “Workers pay below the Living Wage,” The Philippine Daily Inquirer, May 8, 2005, p. A.16.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Information from a research staff of a Senator.

country are the same. They are all corrupt. With the exception of former President Joseph Estrada, the rest knew how to do corruption without being caught. What they said may not be necessarily true; but it is their perception. “No one among our national presidents can resolve our problems. We just have to do it ourselves in our own localities,” one of them remarked.

People also know that only those who are rich and powerful can run for public office on the national level. Poor people look forward towards elections so that they can have more money at one time in their hands from politicians. But if money is to be distributed to people to “buy” votes, the politician after having won will have to see to it that he or she recover his/her losses. Bank robberies and kidnappings happen when elections are nearing. While there is no evidence of the fact that these are spearheaded by some unscrupulous political candidates, people associate bank robberies with those who would like to have more money during election time. There is also the belief that when a new administration is in position and complains about shortage of funds to run the country, the explanation of people is that the previous administration has used the money for election. This is the same explanation people give with a re-election of an incumbent president.

A classical sociologist, W.I. Thomas states that when people see things as real, they are real in their consequences. That is why people’s perceptions are good to study. For events are determined by the way people think about them. Only new experiences can make people change their perceptions.

That almost 4,000 Filipinos leave the country daily demonstrate the lack of incentives here in the Philippines for work – the low wages received by workers in the rural and urban areas vs. cost of living in the Philippines. The consequences of low levels of income is that there are more and more undernourished children, housing is inadequate, cities are congested, employment and unemployment rates even among professionals is high. According to the assessment of a member of the seven (7) who are now working for “Reform Towards National Salvation,” there are 5 million unemployed and 7 million underemployed and if each one of them has a minimum of 2 dependents

one can speak conservatively of 36 million poor people in the Philippines. Peace and order problems especially in Mindanao remain a concern for the government. In a world where there is no more political ideological problems to resolve, the communist ideology nevertheless is still alive in the country and armed groups keep threatening communities and established businesses and institutions.

All the problems and issues are the externalizations of collective interiorities that have not been awakened to the consciousness of public good or common good and of a willingness to contribute to something larger than oneself.

**The Challenge of the Positive Aspects alive in our People.** It would be unfair if we would paint only the dark side of the Philippines. There are at least 65,000 non-governmental organizations in the country who are striving to resolve the social issues in the Philippines. Whether this is in the field of the economy, health, politics, media, education or housing, there are alternative institutions initiated and sustained by people to respond to their basic needs. Every sector – fisherfolk, farmers, indigenous groups, industrial workers, marginalized urban communities, children, youth, and elderly, and women, families of migrant workers – is organizing to promote a more decent life for them. These groups are getting more and more professionalized especially with the help of Philippine Council for NGO Certification (PCNC).

Thousands of social programs, projects and initiatives have emerged especially after People Power of 1986. The creativity of people knows no bounds. In the field of the economy, one hears of projects and programs on micro-finance, micro-enterprise, organization of small entrepreneurs, cooperatives in its varied forms, export-oriented small enterprises that follow the International Fair Trade principles. Through marketing enterprises, handicrafts of small producers from the provinces are exported to alternative trade organizations in Europe. In the field of health – groups get involved in primary health care. Trained care-givers service their respective communities as well as offer their services for hire to upper-middle class groups who are in need of them to take care of their sick and the elderly in their families. Some communities manufacture herbal

medicine as well as grow herbal plants. There are peace groups and those who do self-empowerment of women, groups addressing the victims of HIV-AIDS. People who learn through informal education can be accredited on their learnings by the Secretary of Education and Technological Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). In this regard, Philippine Society is replete with social initiatives in community organization, community development and community enterprises being established in both urban and rural communities. Even art classes for children and youth and theatre advocacy groups are organized to improve self-expression and aesthetic sense. There are 900 ecological organizations that educate people towards ecological consciousness, organic farming, and well-being centers like cosmic gardens. Youth groups organize forums where youth speak and elders listen. There are also organizations that address the problem of street children, of children who are victims of drugs and child prostitution. There are international organizations for children who have their local counterparts here such as: Christian Children Fund, Save the Children, Foster-Parents Plan not to speak of UNICEF. There is the network of youth organizations – inter-university and inter-sectoral - that move dynamically addressing the needs of children and their fellow-youth. There is the intergenerational solidarity research project that assesses the relationship between the children, youth and the elderly within the family and in society to discover whether the policies of institutions in society are fostering solidarity between generations. It is the youth who will be the bridge between the children and the elderly and thus youth is being called to bring about the society they want for, now and in the future. There are the people involved with media advocacy and ‘community communications’. Many sectors are given the art and skill of face to face communication as well as mediated communication - micro-media (through posters and newsletters, etc. ) or through mass media. There are also a number of peace groups.

More positive attempts and initiatives come among leaders of institutions that are trying to connect with all the base initiatives. A former president of Asian Institute of Management (AIM) and former economic consultant of the former President Macapagal, and a businessman, Dr. Sixto Roxas, now starts to develop the concept of development of human resource for eco-friendly community-based management system. He considers

the focus of economics as the community and not just the business “firm”. A physicist turned philosopher and anthropologist, Dr. Serafin Talisayon, sets up a Consciousness Center for leaders of institutions and corporations towards improving their spirituality quotient. A network of professional groups initiated by Dr. Nicanor Perlas created a movement called “Karangalan” (giving honor) in order to give honor to a select group of Filipinos now who despite the Philippine negative situation keep receiving national and global awards in all fields. And there has been a search for such Filipinos in different sectors – business, education, culture, arts, ecology, religion – who exemplify the best of the externalization of the Filipino soul, the Filipino world-view and values.

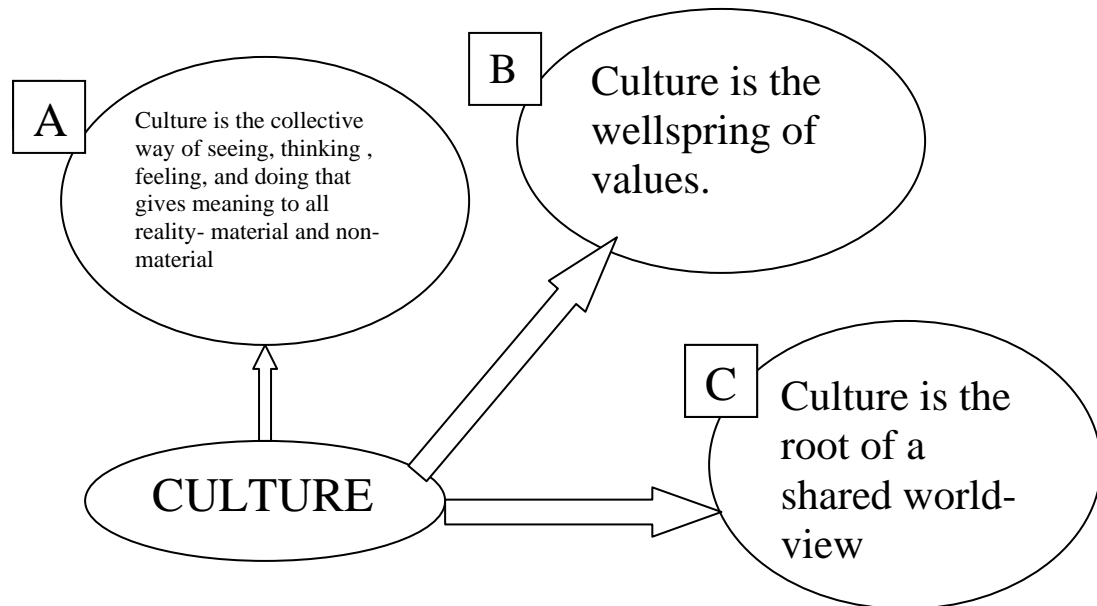
Three thousand schools, colleges, and universities in the country have established their extension work to reach out towards poverty groups. Indeed, Filipinos are already answering albeit on a small scale to the negative side of Philippine reality; but there are even more initiatives (although not reported by mass media) that make up the positive side of Filipino reality. With thousands of initiatives in the country to heal the Filipinos, the family, the community and society it is important to believe in the strength of the Filipino soul and character – compassionate (excellent in tender loving care), has the penchant to be happy – to make do with little (simplicity of life) – possessing a religiosity that believes that whatever good is done is due to God’s blessings. We need a visionary leader who is able to direct all the initiatives to converge towards a direction.

According to Prof. Felipe De Leon, philosopher, humanist, and artist, the Filipino’s greatest strength is his/her instant creativity. Yes, music, poetry, designs, other-oriented-ness in small groups is natural to Filipinos. This creativity is not sufficiently given incentive by the system that would need still to root itself in the rich indigenous, traditional cultural soil while opening itself to the complexities of modern and post-modern life and consciousness.

## **B. Learnings from Basic Social Facts of our Socio-Cultural History**



and Contexts<sup>5</sup>



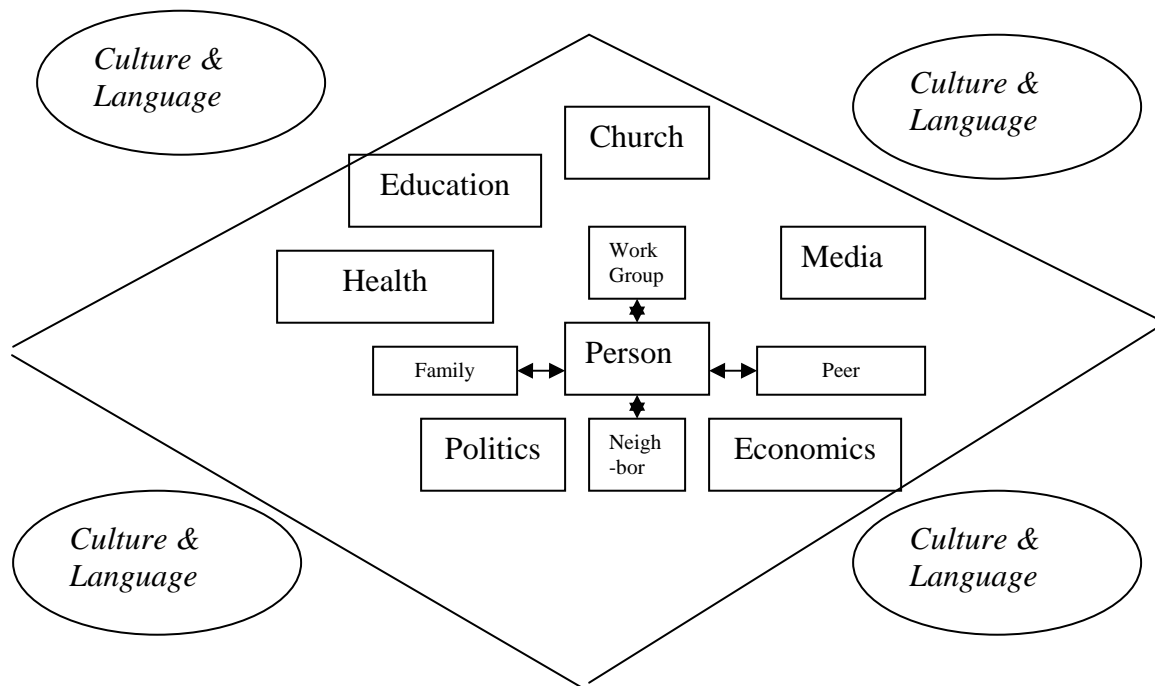
**FIGURE 1**

**Culture and Institution.** An understanding of culture and institution from the perspective of basic social facts is needed to implement a two-fold imperative: 1) to take pride in our roots and 2) to open ourselves to wisdom learned both from our pre-colonial and colonial experiences.

Filipino culture and institution should be understood from the perspective of history

<sup>5</sup> This section is a synthesis of the author's monographs: "Reflections on Culture" (1991), "The Filipino Worldview and Values" (1997), "Understanding Philippine Social Realities Through the Filipino Family" (1993), "Movement Towards Moral Recovery Program" (1993), "When Labor Does Not Pay" (1997), (with Fonz Deza as co-author), "Communication From the Ground Up" (1990), "The Monetary Culture and the Challenge of Equality" (1996).

**Culture and Institution.** Culture and institution are twin aspects of the same reality. Culture, on the one hand, is the collective way of seeing, thinking, feeling and doing that gives meaning to all reality – material and non-material. It is the wellspring of values and the root of a shared world-view. Institution, on the other hand, is an enduring set of behavioral patterns and processes of a collectivity in response to life’s needs. Institution is an externalization of the hidden dimension of culture. In this sense, we can speak of a Filipino political culture, Filipino economic culture, Filipino religious culture, etc. But what may tie these institutional cultures together will be a shared world-view.



**Figure 2**

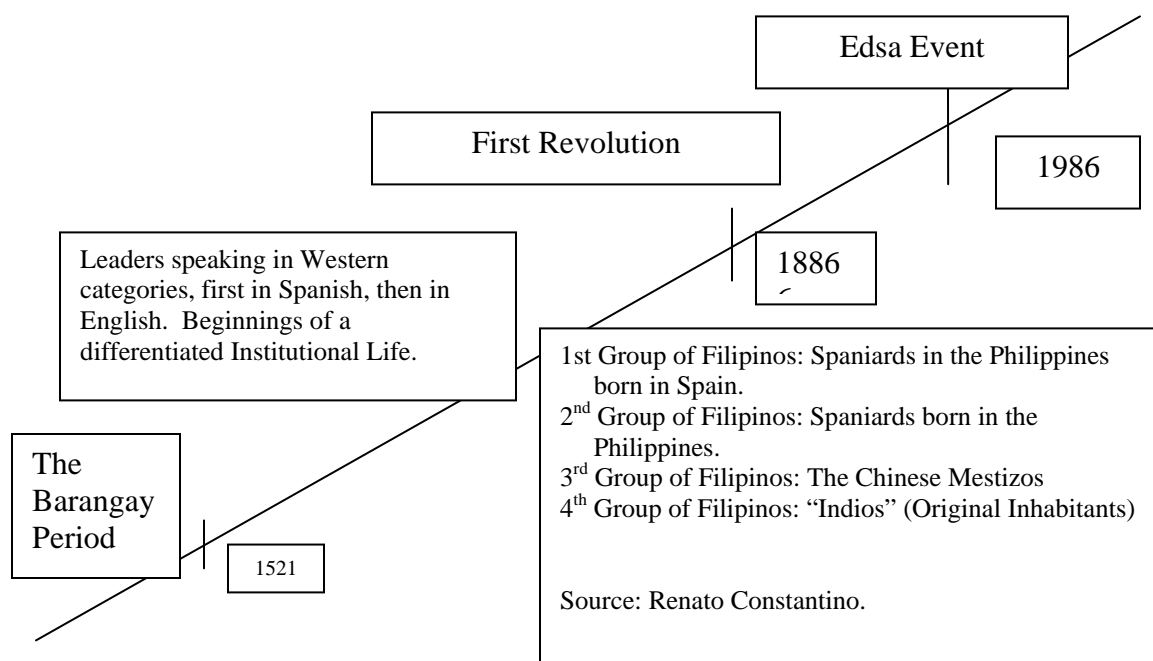
### **Culture is Pervasive**

The world-view may be very much reflected in the languages we Filipinos speak.

Culture is pervasive. We imbibe our values from primary groups – groups with whom we have a face-to-face relationship. These are the work group, the neighborhood group, the family, and peer or friends. Culture may be transmitted to us explicitly and implicitly in secondary institutions such as the School, the Church, the Health Institution – Clinic or Hospital, Government, Business and Media organizations. Culture and world-views are reflected in the languages.

## Historical Dimensions of our Culture and Institutions<sup>6</sup>

The Period of the Barangay of the Pre-Colonial Era is a basic fact of our history. The “Barangay” was a basic social unit then. “Barangay” is associated with “the ship” that carried people from across mainland Asia to settle along the coasts of the different islands of the Philippines. According to the historian, Onofre Corpus, the different “barangays” were each relatively self-sufficient, autonomous groups. The relationships between the different barangays were one ranging from ritual politeness to open hostility. The ritual politeness must be the beginnings of what Frank Lynch, S.J. termed as “smooth interpersonal relationships”<sup>7</sup> demonstrated by the use of euphemistic language in daily social intercourse. Each barangay was constituted by a chieftain (“datu”), kinsmen and slaves.



**Figure 3: Basic Historical Fact of our Socio-Cultural History**

<sup>6</sup>Corpus, Onofre, “The Barangay,” *The Roots of the Filipino Nation*. Quezon City. Aklahi Foundation Inc. Vol. I. 1980, pp. 13-39.

<sup>7</sup> *Four Readings in Philippine Values*. Ateneo de Manila University. 1963.

According to Renato Constantino,<sup>8</sup> the 1<sup>st</sup> group of Filipinos were the Spaniards in the Philippines, the “conquistadores” born in Spain. The second group of Filipinos was the Spaniards born in the Philippines. The 3<sup>rd</sup> group of Filipinos was the Chinese mestizos and last but certainly not the least was the original inhabitants, called “Indios” during the Spanish times. Only since 1896 - the Spanish Revolution - were we all called Filipinos.

It is important to examine the life of our original inhabitants. Since each barangay must have been made of a few families, relationships were very personal. The barangay was like an extended family. In this sense the family was the only real institution that existed prior to the colonial times. Thus, the family is a root cultural paradigm in the Philippines.

The economy in the barangay was an unmediated economics. The economy was characterized by a face-to-face relationships characterized by natural exchanges of goods and services, called barter. The barangay was a political, economic, social, educational unit – highly multifunctional. There was an unwritten law.

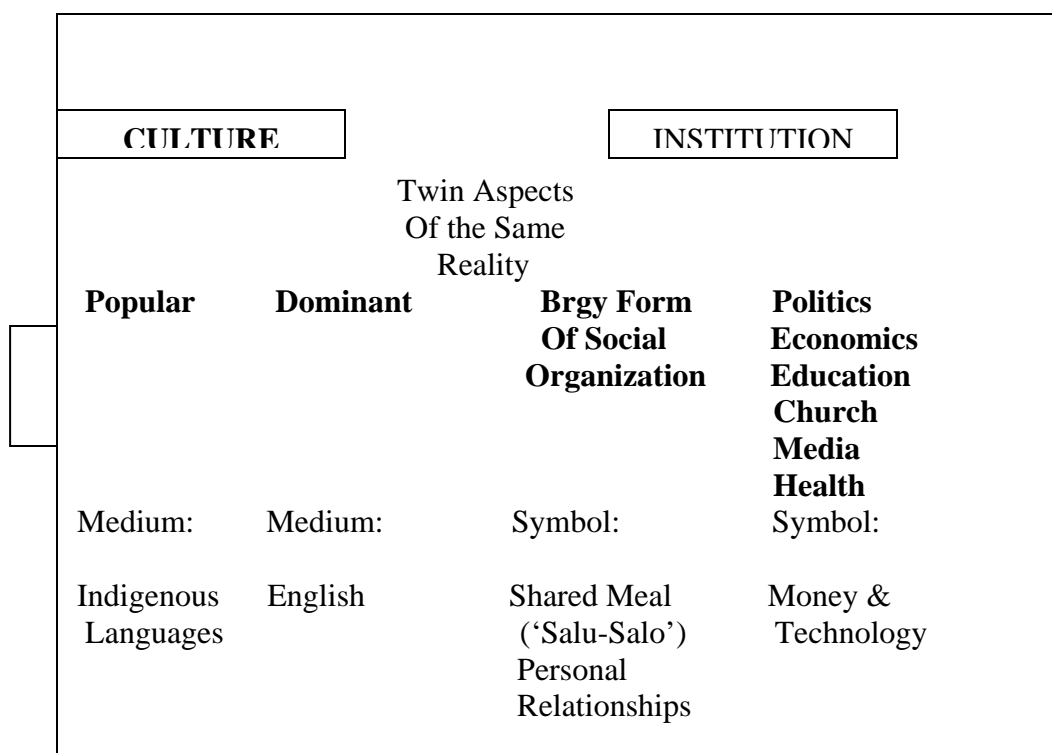
When the Filipinos discovered the Spaniards in their midst, political life became more differentiated. The barangay form of organization was incorporated in the political structure of every municipality. Each town was made up of about a hundred barangays. A Church facing the government building with a town plaza make up the center of every municipality. Around the Church and the government buildings were the houses of the prominent families – the “ilustrados” (leading families whose sons and daughters have studied in schools using the Spanish as medium of education). And behind the center are all the barangays. One sees traces of this town structure while traveling through the various municipalities in the Philippines.

The people speak their own native languages. In the Philippines there are 11 major languages and approximately a hundred variations of the major indigenous

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<sup>8</sup> Philippine History: Revisited.

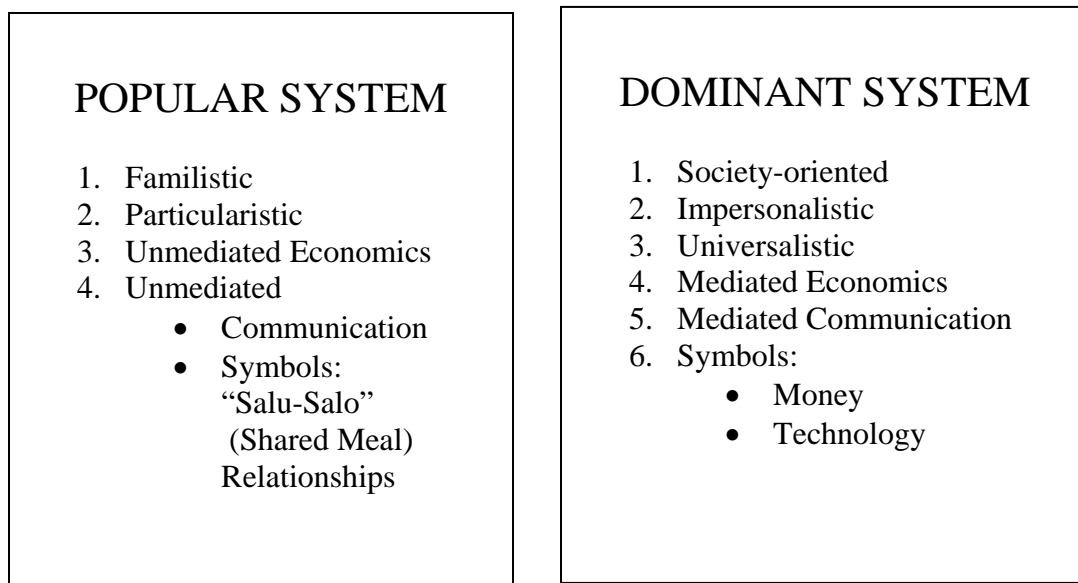
languages. A language may be used in two islands which are in touch by sea transportation. But when a province is divided by mountain ranges, there may be a different language spoken at each side of the mountain. That the Philippines is composed of 7,100 islands (although only one-third is inhabited) speak of the various ethnic-cultures in the country, not to speak of a largely Christian lowlands, and the Muslims in Mindanao of Southern Philippines as well as the minorities living in the Cordilleras of the North and in other mountainous areas in different parts of the country.



**Figure 4: Popular & Dominant Cultural Systems**

Colonization has created two cultural systems in the Philippines – the Indigenous (Popular) Cultural System and the Dominant Cultural System. The indigenous/popular culture comes to us through the indigenous languages. The dominant cultural system comes to us first through the vehicle of the Spanish language and then and more penetratingly, through the English language. In relation to the institutional aspect, the barangay form of organization – the only institution that existed prior to colonial times became after colonialism more differentiated into politics, economics, education, church, media and health institutions. The symbol of the barangay institutional form of

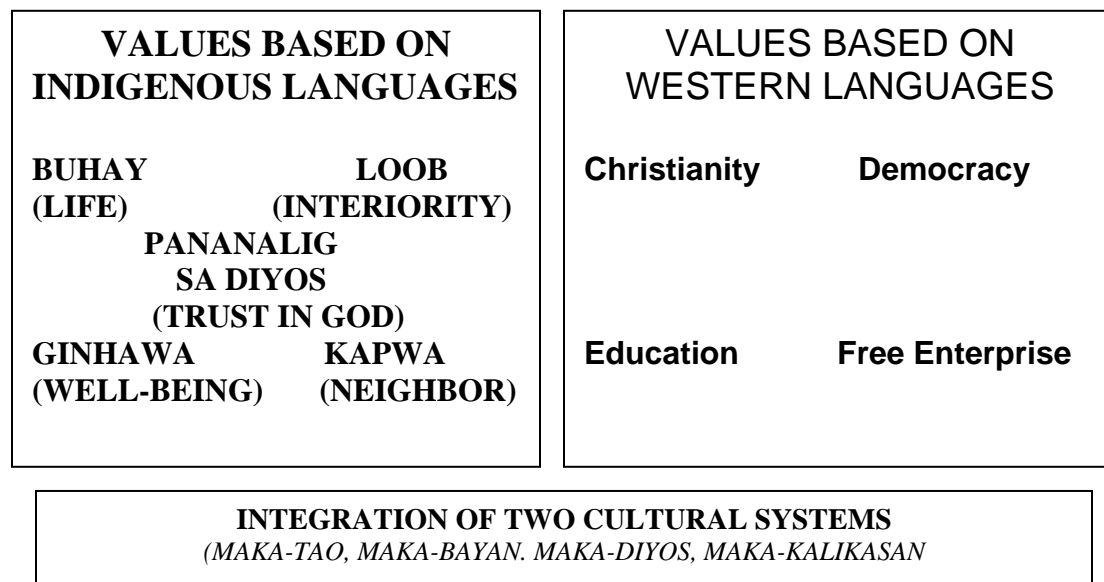
organization was “salu-salo” a common meal that cemented close relationships. On the other hand, the differentiated institutional set-up had money and technology as its symbols.



**Figure 5: Characteristics of the Popular System vs. the Dominant System**

It is important to understand that in the Filipino there two cultural systems that are operating. The characteristics of the indigenous/popular system are the following: 1) it is familistic and small group-oriented 2) it is particularistic 3) its economics is unmediated: people live by barter of services and of goods, 4) also it lays stress to unmediated (face to face) communication, thus is very personalistic. In effect the indigenous/popular cultural system has had its origin in the “baranganic” culture prior to colonial times. When all our institutions have been imposed in our country, the great majority of Filipinos did not realize the assumptions of the differentiated institutional system nor the monetized economy that went with these institutional impositions. Our institutions have not naturally developed on our own. The dominant culture is the legacy of a western system of education. The characteristics of the dominant system are the following: 1) society-oriented vs. small group-oriented; 2) impersonalistic vs. personalistic; 3) universalistic

vs. particularistic, 4) economics is mediated by money vs. unmediated economics (barter); 5) mediated communication (mass media) vs. unmediated communication which is face-to-face.



**FIGURE 6: VALUES BASED ON TWO CULTURAL SYSTEMS  
AND A MODE OF INTEGRATION**

Culture comes to us through the language we speak. While people speak their respective indigenous languages, the medium of education since colonial times was first Spanish and since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, English. After the Spanish American War when the Philippines was sold by Spain to America for 20 million U.S. dollars, Filipinos fought fiercely the Americans. It is as if America found a way of pacifying the Filipinos by establishing public schools all over the country and sending there the American teachers to teach English. And that is how Filipinos acquired American tastes. From America we got the presidential system of government whose central government is in Manila with laws promulgated to be applied in all provinces.

The social order officially in our country is built on a democratic framework. We learn that the Constitution is the basic law of the land. Our Legislative Body is tasked to

legislate and there are excellent laws to protect the human rights of citizens. Yet these laws are not known on the barangay level. Worse, laws are not being implemented. The West has instituted a device to check their individualism with the norm: Obey the law and you take care of the common good. In the Philippines, we have not been sensitized to obeying the law or even the rule. Even in the city, traffic rules are violated. The traffic lights are not being followed. If one examines the phenomenon, one finds the indigenous value of personalism and particularism that takes over impersonalism and universalism of a social order that has developed in the West to cope with modern life contexts – industrialization, urbanization, mass education, and mass media. Thus, when people cross the street and the lights turn green for us, we Filipinos do not automatically cross the street. We look at the driver (personalistic behavior), and when the driver looks at us, the driver might stop for us but when he does not look at us (follows impersonalism), we do not cross the street. We follow the crowd; we do not follow the lights. The integration between the popular/indigenous cultures with the dominant culture has not yet happened; because we have not made people aware of the assumptions of these two cultural systems working in us. Whichever system will work for us and for our families is the system we shall follow. To resolve conflicts, when one has money (product of a modern economy and dominant culture), one will threaten the other by saying, “I will have you sued.” but when one has no money, “there will be a personal negotiation for a settlement” of the case. This is also the reason why we speak of an underground economy, an informal system. Due to the severe objective limitations in the country in which people have to live, alternatives emerge. These are all people’s own initiatives.

In both cultural systems, there are sets of life-values that can guide positive behavior for the common good. In the indigenous/popular system, embedded in our language are the values for Life (“buhay”), a stress on interiority (“loob”), well being (“ginhawa”), neighbor (“kapwa”) and trust in God (“pananalig sa Diyos”). Our language is also non-sexist – there is one word for son and daughter (“anak”), for brotherhood/sisterhood (“kapatiran”), for husband and wife (“asawa”) and our God has both the components of motherhood and fatherhood (“Bathala” where “ba” stands for the



female, “babae” and “la” stands for the male, “lalake”) In the dominant system, we have been taught the universalistic values embedded in Western-imbibed Christianity, democracy, formal Education, and free Enterprise Economy. Due to the interplay between the indigenous/popular system with the dominant system, universalistic values are more often than not practiced for particularistic ends. A public office becomes a way for private gain. Public officials justify their actions by saying “Is it wrong to take care of one’s family?” The family here becomes the highest norm of morality. Religious sentiments of the people are exploited for power and material gain.

Yet, there were shining moments in Philippine history, when our leaders exemplified through their lives self-sacrifice (“pagmamalasakit”) for the common good of the country. We have had our heroic traditions. And one may ask, why children and youth have not been educated in these heroic traditions, why our heroes have not been role models for leadership. Also, in one significant event of 1986, ninety years after the Filipino Revolt against Spain, the indigenous/popular system got integrated with the dominant system when the so-called People Power which had all the elements of our popular/indigenous culture manifested universalistic values of being Pro-People (“Maka-Tao”), Pro-Country (“Maka-Bayan”) and Pro-God (“Maka-Diyos”). Later Filipinos have come up with the value of Pro-Nature (“Maka-Kalikasan”). These values if exercised in an integrated way could incorporate the “indigenous” and Western imbibed values and could bring the country to a consciousness of the larger good, the public good, the common good. People Power-I in EDSA was a highly moral and spiritual power. To institutionalize People Power I was to sustain the moral and primordial spirituality of our people. All the cultural assertions of our popular culture were manifested in that one event. Then, our active non-violent approach had all the elements of our penchant for celebration – color, religious rituals, religious images, song and dance and a sharing of meals. The symbol of the event was really a shared meal where the military and the nun, the rich and the poor, the uneducated and the educated, the Muslim and the Christian had a “salu-salo” (shared meal). When all people can share a meal together without exclusion, there is peace, justice and solidarity with people as well as with the earth.

### **C. The Desirability of the Swiss Model of a Federal System of Government.**

Roger B. Myerson contends that “unitary democracy can be frustrated when voters do not replace corrupt leaders, because any new leader would probably also govern corruptly.” Thus, he advocates for a federal democracy which according to him, “cannot be consistently frustrated at both national and provincial levels, because provincial leaders who govern responsibly could build reputations to become contenders for higher national office. Similarly, democracy cannot be consistently frustrated in a democratization process that begins with decentralized provincial democracy and only later introduces nationally elected leadership.” (“Federalism and Incentives for Success of Democracy,” <http://home.uchicago.edu/~rmyerson/research/federal.pdf>)

This paper argues that a critical aspect of culture that will make for democracy to work is the kind of reputation that people expect or attribute to their political leaders. If people are convinced that leaders who exemplify working for the common good should be voted upon, then voters will choose these types of leaders. If, however, the voting public has had the tradition that people who are voted to office are expected to please their superiors or their supporters, then the public good as advocated by the Constitution will not be served.

Democracy fails when leaders without a sense of the common good are voted upon. Democracy is frustrated when the people seem not to react to leaders who work for their own vested interests. Or even as they react, they feel powerless because what determines the implementation of policies is whether or not the pressure groups have the financial means to bribe those in power. Hence, if at all, those who have money through corruption will control the direction of government to serve not the common good but vested interests. Even the wheels of justice will be stifled by corrupt practices. And worse, in a system where there operates this culture of corruption, good and honest people will be penalized or ousted because beneficiaries of a corrupt system will not want to change.

The Philippines has a unitary government. It is now a practice that only those who are moneyed can win in the elections. In a poor country like in the Philippines those who can support a candidate are the wealthy, the rich, and the powerful. When the politician gets into power, the poor who have been promised a better life are neglected and forgotten. This situation then becomes the breeding ground for insurrections and Leftist organizations who advocate armed struggle. There is a tendency for the military to be politicized and aspire for political power. Ordinary citizens are caught up in this power play for a few vested interests.

Would a Federal System work better in this country to resolve our social ills? Offhand, considering the confusion in our cultural identity as a people, federalism may not work unless we begin experiencing a system where leaders of good repute and with a sense of the common good inspire people to contribute their talents towards the well-being of people - the larger good in society. .

When examining the many forms of federalism in the world, the Swiss federal system has appealed to me due to the fact that it sprang from relatively autonomous groups called “cantons” which at a certain stage in their history could only be integrated through a central government with minimal responsibilities.

Federalism in Switzerland like in other countries has been shaped by their history and political structure. It is striking that in the beginning they had basic political units much like our “barangays” prior to colonial times, independent from each other. These cantons had fought with each other until they have agreed to confederate in a federal state with minimal central government.

There were three principles which govern the relatively autonomous operation of the cantons. These are: **non-centralization, subsidiarity, and solidarity**. At first, the Catholics who had wanted to be granted as much autonomy as possible expressed resistance to the idea of a central administration and a clearly defined separation of

competence. . The majority, however, favored a small central administration. The **principle of subsidiarity** follows from that of **non-centralization**. The central power can only carry out tasks that are beyond the means of its constituent elements – the cantons. In contrast to the federalism in the United States, in which competition between the individual states plays an important role, Swiss federation is characterized and defined by the idea of **solidarity** between the cantons and different parts of the country. Inter-cantonal competition exists to a certain degree, for instance, where taxation policies are concerned. Differences are balanced when “weaker and stronger cantons or regions are evened out by transfer payments.

This is why the respective responsibilities of the government and the cantons came to be defined in the Constitution. If the cantons want the government to take over responsibilities previously within their sphere of competence, a change in the constitution (and therefore a people’s initiative) is required.

. Laws from Central Government were to be applied by the cantons, which already possessed the infrastructure. With the coming of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there is an ever-increasing number of issues which demand a closer cooperation between the central government and the cantons. This is referred to as cooperative federalism.

The Swiss model of federalism seems to be an ideal set-up in the Philippines because of its evolution from independent “cantons” analogous to our “relatively self-sufficient barangays” of earlier days. But the difference between the Swiss socio-historical context and ours is that the cantons naturally evolved into the Federal System without external intervention. With the Philippines, what makes our situation more complicated is that there have been external interventions in bringing about the system we have now. The external intervention in our socio-political reality has distorted the premises of a democracy. Because it has not been built on a non-centralized framework, our kind of centralized democratic set-up has bred corruption which has been copied on lower levels. Vested interests are almost an expectation from the people. People do not trust that leaders when they come to power will work for the common good. Thus, they

strengthen lobbying, pressure groups, which also become powerless when money rules in the political ball game.

Good people do not want to enter politics because they could be co-opted in a system of pursuing one's vested interests. The honest and the good many a time become penalized because the incumbent beneficiaries of the system would not want a system changed that will prevent them from being the beneficiaries.

Yet from within this same system, one can identify persons in the government who are sincere and creative within the severe objective limitations of the political environment. There are local mayors who have in a way practiced decentralization in their stance, who have been identified as pro-people, pro-God, pro-country and pro-nature. There are mayors who because of their sincerity would run and get elected because of their integrity and no opposition would dare to run against them. There are in every sector, Filipino leaders of integrity. But they are not recognized. Perhaps they will only be recognized when they die.

#### **D. Positive mapping as a Participatory Research and Educational Process in all Sectors – a Basis of Building the Human Infrastructure for a Federal System of Government.**

I repeat my basic postulate in this paper: **No system of government will work for a country as long as the intangible dimensions of politics and government – the inner person of the Filipino, the politician and culture – are not addressed.**

It is clear that there may be socio-cultural supports for the federal system in the country. However there should be a cultural synthesis between the dominant system and the indigenous/popular cultural system. We need to take pride in our indigenous/popular roots while opening ourselves to the wisdom from our socio-cultural heritage including those we have learned from our experience of colonialism. We should be adept in our indigenous languages as well as with English especially now in a time of globalization.

It is my contention that federalism that takes into consideration the three principles of non-centralization, subsidiarity and solidarity can only work if we first prepare the human infrastructure, the cultural soil that sensitizes us to human rights and common good, from which context authentic public servants will emerge from the “barangay”, municipality, provincial levels. This one year preparation should be through a participatory and research process that will appreciate and recognize the local communities where leaders have succeeded to inspire people to work for the common good of all – without exclusion and marginalization.

There are already such movements that strive to bring a new collective self-image of the Filipino. There is the “Karangalan” national movement giving honor to the Filipino. There is the Alliance of the Common Good Movement led by a young General Secretary which wishes to form a political party based on the principles just mentioned.

We dream of Filipino leaders who have the common good of society at heart and will work effectively on the local level inspiring citizens to contribute their best towards a new economics, a new politics and a culture of life-givingness. (“pagibibigay-buhay at ginhawa’). We dream of leaders where word and deed are one, who live the organizing principles of being pro-people, pro-country, pro-God and pro-nature in a federal system that exercises the principles of non-centralization, subsidiarity and solidarity.

A climate of decentralization under good leaders will be the breeding ground for leadership on the higher levels. My proposal for preparing the ground for a federal system of government would be along the line of positive mapping as a participatory research and educational process. In this process, we begin identifying, recognizing and appreciating leaders at the local level who have successfully practiced non-centralization and culturally-rooted approaches to creating institutions for the well-being of their people, whose selfless dedication radiates itself in the improvement of the local economy, educational standards, community development and deepening of spirituality and

enhancing the work ethic, institutions where integration of the good works in the community and formation of public servants is an on-going undertaking.

I personally think that we should be able to give time until the human infrastructure at the base is ready before instituting a system of federalism. If we force this change of system without a change of mindsets, values and socio-cultural transformation, the system that we shall change will re-create itself many times over at lower levels.

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