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## **The Racial Slur against Bisaya in The Light Of John Rawls’ theory of Justice**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In the Philippines, racism is a prejudice that is present and yet most Filipinos are ignorant that is currently in our society's system. They are not aware that they're making racist comments and judgments on a daily basis. It is considered a problem even when you ignore the issue and not confront it. Discrimination exists in various forms. Everybody is aware of the lousy prejudice and stereotypes that are being thrown to Bisaya people. The **Bisaya** language is often used when cracking a joke or when someone is trying to make a person laugh by mimicking the native accent. What's more saddening, is the fact that the Visayan people are being turned into a laughing stock just because some people think they are better than them.*

*Rawls's conception of society is defined by fairness: social institutions are to be fair to all cooperating members of society, regardless of their race, gender, religion, class of origin, natural talents, reasonable conception of the good life, and so on. Intelligence and reputation isn't based on a person's financial capability, nationality or race – but rather on the person's skills and abilities which are the things that should be given more attention. At the end of the day, everyone who lives in the Philippines are all the same. It is the people who builds barriers and distance themselves away from each other. The truth is, no language is inferior or superior to another. Diversity is, after all, what makes our country unique and attractive to many people around the world. Many Filipinos are bilingual or even multilingual because the country boasts more than 100 languages or dialects. We should all be proud of all of our languages. Your dialect/culture doesn't make you less of a person.*

**KEYWORDS:** *discrimination, bisaya, justice, Rawls', racism*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the Philippines, discrimination exists in various forms. Everybody is aware of the lousy prejudice and stereotypes that are being thrown to Bisaya people. The **Bisaya** language is often used when cracking a joke or when someone is trying to make a person laugh by mimicking the native accent. What's more saddening, is the fact that the Visayan people are being turned into a laughing stock just because some people think they are better than them.

In fact, Visayas and Mindanao is also a successful region in the country despite being away from the capital city. As a matter of detail, tourists are fonder of visiting famous places located in the region rather than in Luzon because of the beautiful beaches around the provinces. Also, the region is considered the major Breadbasket of the Philippines. Eight of the top 10 agri-commodities exported from the Philippines come from the island.

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Every day, discrimination is committed against a Bisaya -- on TV shows, on radio programs, on the streets and inside buses, trains, passenger jeepneys, malls, department stores, even churches. Everywhere. It pains to hear the deejay of an early morning FM radio program having fun emulating the way a Bisaya speaks Tagalog with a distinctly heavy or regional accent. When a Bisaya mispronounces a Tagalog word or two, a Tagalog bursts into laughter.

Racism is the discrimination and targeted bigotry towards another race. This discrimination is derived from the amount of melanin your skin has to even your cultural ethnicity. It can also be defined as feeling dominant and superior to other racial groups, as stated in the Merriam Webster Dictionary. This issue is more common in the north — tagalogs dominate the bisaya.

In the Philippines, racism is a prejudice that is present and yet most Filipinos are ignorant that is currently in our society's system. They are not aware that they're making racist comments and judgments on a daily basis. It is considered a problem even when you ignore the issue and not confront it.

This is a kind of point that challenge generations. Filipinos were raised with such subtle yet steadfast prejudices—not only those based on geographical, but also those based on religion, background and social status. We were not outright taught to discriminate, but we learned it by example anyway.

People should get the same, or be treated the same, or be treated as equal, in some respect. An alternative view expands on this last-mentioned option: People should be treated as equal, should treat one another as equal, should relate as equal, or enjoy an equality of social status of some sort.

Such was the very picture of a world without borders, where kindness, generosity and amity flowed freely through perceived barriers. Though faiths, backgrounds, and affiliations varied, these were not used to maintain separation or to establish one's superiority over the other. These differences played no role at all. Everyone was just being human.

This study reviews the relevant philosophical literature on discrimination, with an emphasis on social discrimination focusing on the Bisaya. It begins by defining the racial slur and discussing the theory of justice as fairness and its application to the problem of discrimination. This discussion seeks to orient readers to some important issues and concerns against social discrimination experienced by the Bisayas' and to provide a roadmap for those interested in building upon this important line of research.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Social discrimination is defined as sustained inequality between individuals on the basis of illness, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or any other measures of diversity. To discriminate against someone is to exclude that person from the full enjoyment of their political, civic, economic, social or cultural rights and freedoms. Discrimination contradicts a basic principle of human rights: that all people are equal in dignity and entitled to the same fundamental rights.

Discrimination is often based on ignorance, prejudices and negative stereotypes. Because many people fear what seems strange or unknown, they react with suspicion or even violence to anyone whose appearance, culture or behavior is unfamiliar. Attitudes, actions or

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institutional practices that subordinate or marginalize anyone can be considered discrimination. Racism in particular has historical roots in beliefs in the superiority of one group over another, beliefs that were once used to justify discrimination against ‘inferior’ groups. Although such beliefs are now widely rejected, racial discrimination nevertheless continues to exist.

Egalitarianism is a contested concept in social and political thought. One might care about human equality in many ways, for many reasons. As currently used, the label “egalitarian” does not necessarily indicate that the doctrine so called holds that it is desirable that people’s condition be made the same in any respect or that people ought to be treated the same in any respect. An egalitarian might rather be one who maintains that people ought to be treated as equals—as possessing equal fundamental worth and dignity and as equally morally considerable.

Further norms of equality of condition or treatment might be viewed as free-standing or derived from the claim of equality of status. Controversy also swirls around attempts to specify the class of beings to whom egalitarian norms apply. Some might count all and only human beings as entitled to equality of status. Some would hold that all and only persons have equal moral status, with the criteria of personhood excluding some humans from qualifying (e.g., the unborn fetus or severely demented adult human) and including some nonhumans (e.g., intelligent beings inhabiting regions of outer space beyond Earth). Some would hold that sentient beings such as nonhuman primates that do not satisfy criteria of personhood are entitled to equal moral status along with persons.

Rawls sees political philosophy as fulfilling at least four roles in a society’s public life. The first role is practical: political philosophy can discover grounds for reasoned agreement in a society where sharp divisions threaten to lead to conflict. Rawls cites Hobbes’s *Leviathan* as an attempt to solve the problem of order during the English civil war, and the *Federalist Papers* as emerging from the debate over the US Constitution.

A second role of political philosophy is to help citizens to orient themselves within their own social world. Philosophy can meditate on what it is to be a member of a certain society, and how the nature and history of that society can be understood from a broader perspective.

A third role is to probe the limits of practicable political possibility. Political philosophy must describe workable political arrangements that can gain support from real people. Yet within these limits, philosophy can be utopian: it can depict a social order that is the best that we can hope for. Given men as they are, as Rousseau said, philosophy imagines how laws might be.

A fourth role of political philosophy is reconciliation: “to calm our frustration and rage against our society and its history by showing us the way in which its institutions... are rational, and developed over time as they did to attain their present, rational form”. Philosophy can show that human life is not simply domination and cruelty, prejudice, folly and corruption; but that at least in some ways it is better that it has become as it is.

Rawls viewed his own work as a practical contribution to resolving the long-standing tension in democratic thought between liberty and equality, and to limning the limits of civic and of international toleration. He offers the members of his own society a way of understanding themselves as free and equal citizens within a fair democratic polity, and describes a hopeful vision of a stably just constitutional democracy doing its part within a peaceful international

community. To individuals who are frustrated that their fellow citizens and fellow humans do not see the whole truth as they do, Rawls offers the reconciling thought that this diversity of worldviews results from, and can support, a social order with greater freedom for all. Rawls viewed his own work as a practical contribution to resolving the long-standing tension in democratic thought between liberty and equality, and to limning the limits of civic and of international toleration. He offers the members of his own society a way of understanding themselves as free and equal citizens within a fair democratic polity, and describes a hopeful vision of a stably just constitutional democracy doing its part within a peaceful international community. To individuals who are frustrated that their fellow citizens and fellow humans do not see the whole truth as they do, Rawls offers the reconciling thought that this diversity of worldviews results from, and can support, a social order with greater freedom for all.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The purpose of the study is to review the relevant philosophical literature on discrimination, with an emphasis on social discrimination focusing on the Bisaya.

This discussion seeks to orient readers to some important issues and concerns against social discrimination experienced by the Bisayas’.

1. What is the racial slur against Bisayas’?
2. What is John Rawls’ theory of justice?
3. How can social philosophy be applied to the problem of discrimination?

### **SCOPE AND LIMITATION**

This study will make use of reviews on the relevant philosophical literature on discrimination, with an emphasis on social discrimination focusing on the Bisaya. It begins by defining the racial slur and discussing the theory of justice as fairness and its application to the problem of discrimination.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study hopes to orient readers to some important issues and concerns against social discrimination experienced by the Bisayas’ and to provide a roadmap for those interested in building upon this important line of research.

### **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

Racial Discrimination, according to its most simple definition, refers to unequal treatment of persons or groups on the basis of their race or ethnicity. In defining racial discrimination, the National Research Council differentiates between differential treatment and differential effects, creating a two-part definition: “(1) differential treatment on the basis of race that disadvantages a racial group and (2) treatment on the basis of inadequately justified factors other than race that disadvantages a racial group” (NRC, 2004:39-40).

Bisaya, a general term for a person who lives in the southern islands of the Philippines.

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## **THE PHILOSOPHY OF JOHN RAWLS**

Justice as fairness aims to describe a just arrangement of the major political and social institutions of a liberal society: the political constitution, the legal system, the economy, the family, and so on. Rawls calls the arrangement of these institutions a society's *basic structure*. The basic structure is the location of justice because these institutions distribute the main benefits and burdens of social life: who will receive social recognition, who will have which basic rights, who will have opportunities to get what kind of work, what the distribution of income and wealth will be, and so on.

The form of a society's basic structure will have profound effects on the lives of citizens. The basic structure will influence not only their life prospects, but more deeply their goals, their attitudes, their relationships, and their characters. Institutions that will have such pervasive influence on people's lives require justification. Since leaving one's society is not a realistic option for most people, the justification cannot be that citizens have consented to a basic structure by staying in the country. And since the rules of any basic structure will be coercively enforced, often with serious penalties, the demand to justify the imposition of any particular set of rules intensifies further.

In setting out justice as fairness, Rawls assumes that the liberal society in question is marked by reasonable pluralism as described above, and also that it is under reasonably favorable conditions: that there are enough resources for it to be possible for everyone's basic needs to be met. Rawls makes the simplifying assumption that the society is self-sufficient and closed, so that citizens enter it only by birth and leave it only at death. He also confines his attention mainly to ideal theory, putting aside questions such as those of criminal justice.

### **Two Guiding Ideas of Justice as Fairness**

Social cooperation in some form is necessary for citizens to be able to lead decent lives. Yet citizens are not indifferent to how the benefits and burdens of cooperation will be divided amongst them. Rawls's principles of justice as fairness articulate the central liberal ideas that cooperation should be fair to all citizens regarded as free and as equals. The distinctive interpretation that Rawls gives to these concepts can be seen as combining a negative and a positive thesis.

Rawls's negative thesis starts with the idea that citizens do not deserve to be born into a rich or a poor family, to be born naturally more or less gifted than others, to be born female or male, to be born a member of a particular racial group, and so on. Since these features of persons are morally arbitrary in this sense, citizens are not entitled to more of the benefits of social cooperation simply because of them. For example the fact that a citizen was born rich, white, and male provides no reason in itself for this citizen to be favored by social institutions.

This negative thesis does not say how social goods should be distributed; it merely clears the decks. Rawls's positive distributive thesis is equality-based reciprocity. All social goods are to be distributed equally, unless an unequal distribution would be to everyone's advantage. The guiding idea is that since citizens are fundamentally equal, reasoning about justice should begin from a presumption that cooperatively-produced goods should be equally divided. Justice then requires that any inequalities must benefit all citizens, and particularly must

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benefit those who will have the least. Equality sets the baseline; from there any inequalities must improve everyone's situation, and especially the situation of the worst-off. These strong requirements of equality and reciprocal advantage are hallmarks of Rawls's theory of justice.

### **The Two Principles of Justice as Fairness**

These guiding ideas of justice as fairness are given institutional form by its two principles of justice:

**First Principle:** Each person has the same indefeasible claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties, which scheme is compatible with the same scheme of liberties for all;

**Second Principle:** Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions:

- a. They are to be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of *fair equality of opportunity*;
- b. They are to be to the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged members of society (the *difference principle*).

### **THE SOCIAL ISSUE: RACIAL SLUR AGAINST BISAYA**

The rampant crimes, chaos, judgements, criticisms, and discrimination, among others are only some of the numerous forms of negativities that surround people nowadays. Discrimination, for instance, has different kinds, and a lot of people may experience it in their everyday lives. A person can be discriminated either because of his/her age, gender, religion, race, ethnicity, or status in life, and people can be really harsh about it.

Accent is the influence of one's first language in the way subsequent languages are spoken. In the Philippines, Filipinos from different regions speak with various accents. You can identify a Visayan from a Tagalog, as well as Pampangos, Ilocanos or Bicolanos by the way they speak Filipino, our national language. It is not only the pronunciations that differ, there are also the different rhythms in speaking

The discrimination has masked as jokes against Bisaya people, in movies and in television, Bisaya people are always stereotypically portrayed as comic characters, someone who belongs to the lower class—a maid or a side-kick jester of the main character. The Bisaya is always dark-skinned and trying hard to speak English or Tagalog with a thick Bisaya accent that's laughable.

In the Philippines, Visayas and Mindanao are also a successful regions in the country despite being away from the capital city. As a matter of fact, tourists are fonder of visiting famous places located in the region rather than in Luzon because of the beautiful beaches around the provinces. However, there are some Filipinos who treat their fellow countrymen different just because they came from a different place and they are not used to the particular language.

The Bisaya language is often used when cracking a joke or when someone is trying to make a person laugh by mimicking the native accent. What's more saddening, is the fact that the Visayan people are being turned into a laughing stock just because some people think they are better than them.

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One woman, from Visayas got fed up in behalf of all her fellow Visayans because of the harsh treatment and negative impression given to them, after some netizens declared that the results of the bar examinations are rigged since there are a lot of people from Visayas who passed the exam. Her post immediately went viral as it was an issue which should come to an end once and for all.

Koya... Ati... are a couple of dead giveaways that the speaker is Bisaya (Visayan). Those from "down south," be it the Visayas or Mindanao group of islands, who are living in Metropolitan Manila, take pains to hide their regional accent, lest they become the butt of jokes. The famous Bisaya pronunciation is basically the switching of vowel sounds: "e" to "I," "o" to "u," and vice versa — a very merry mix-up. The most disparaging remark you will ever hear is that Bisaya is "low-class" compared to Tagalog. Perhaps this is because of the way TV portrays speakers of the language.

This subject is something I know too well being a Bisaya who once lived in a Tagalog province. To be accepted, not just being tolerated, you need to do more than the average, it's a requisite. As a society, we must cohesively fight this silent war, which should have long ceased to exist in a civilized nation like ours that prides on equality and freedom.

### **THE APPLICATION OF THE PHILOSOPHY TO THE ISSUE**

John Rawls theory of *justice as fairness* describes a society of free citizens holding equal basic rights and cooperating within an egalitarian economic system. In a free society, citizens will have disparate worldviews. They will believe in different religions or none at all; they will have differing conceptions of right and wrong; they will divide on the value of lifestyles and of forms of interpersonal relationships. Democratic citizens will have contrary commitments, yet within any country there can only be one law. The law must either establish a national church, or not; women must either have equal rights, or not; abortion and gay marriage must either be permissible under the constitution, or not; the economy must be set up in one way or another.

Rawlsian citizens are not only free and equal, they are also reasonable and rational. The idea that citizens are reasonable is familiar from political liberalism. Reasonable citizens have the capacity to abide by fair terms of cooperation, even at the expense of their own interests, provided that others are also willing to do so. In justice as fairness, Rawls calls this reasonableness the capacity for a *sense of justice*. Citizens are also rational: they have the capacity to pursue and revise their own view of what is valuable in human life. Rawls calls this the capacity for a *conception of the good*. Together these capacities are called the *two moral powers*.

Like every theory of justice (for example those of Locke, Rousseau and Mill), justice as fairness requires an account of citizens' fundamental interests: what citizens need *qua* citizens. Rawls derives his account of *primary goods* from the conception of the citizen as free and equal, reasonable and rational. Primary goods are essential for developing and exercising the two moral powers, and are useful for pursuing a wide range of specific conceptions of the good life. Primary goods are: (1) The basic rights and liberties; (2) Freedom of movement, and free choice among a wide range of occupations; (3) The powers of offices and positions of responsibility; (4) Income and wealth; (5) The social bases of self-

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respect: the recognition by social institutions that gives citizens a sense of self-worth and the confidence to carry out their plans. (*JF*, 58–59)

All citizens are assumed to have fundamental interests in getting more of these primary goods, and political institutions are to evaluate how well citizens are doing according to what primary goods they have. It is equalities and inequalities of these primary goods that, Rawls claims, are of the greatest political significance.

Rawls also emphasizes publicity as an aspect of fairness. In what he calls a well-ordered society all citizens accept the principles of justice and know that their fellow citizens also do so, and all citizens recognize that the basic structure is just. The full philosophical justifications for the principles of justice are also knowable by and acceptable to all reasonable citizens.

The idea behind publicity is that since the principles for the basic structure will be coercively enforced on free citizens, they should stand up to public scrutiny. The publicity condition requires that a society's operative principles of justice not be too esoteric, and not be screens for deeper power relations. Fairness requires that, in “public political life, nothing need be hidden...there is no need for the illusions and delusions of ideology for society to work properly and for citizens to accept it willingly.” (*PL*, 68–69).

The first principle of equal basic liberties is to be embodied in the political constitution, while the second principle applies primarily to economic institutions. Fulfillment of the first principle takes priority over fulfillment of the second principle, and within the second principle fair equality of opportunity takes priority over the difference principle.

The first principle affirms that all citizens should have the familiar basic rights and liberties: liberty of conscience and freedom of association, freedom of speech and liberty of the person, the rights to vote, to hold public office, to be treated in accordance with the rule of law, and so on. The first principle accords these rights and liberties to all citizens equally. Unequal rights would not benefit those who would get a lesser share of the rights, so justice requires equal rights for all, in all normal circumstances.

Rawls's first principle confirms widespread convictions about the importance of equal basic rights and liberties. Two further features make this principle distinctive. First is its priority: the basic rights and liberties must not be traded off against other social goods. The first principle disallows, for instance, a policy that would give draft exemptions to college students on the grounds that educated civilians will increase economic productivity. The draft is a drastic infringement on basic liberties, and if a draft is implemented then all who are able to serve must be equally subject to it, even if this means slower growth. Citizens' equal liberty must have priority over economic policy.

The second distinctive feature of Rawls's first principle is that it requires *fair value of the political liberties*. The political liberties are a subset of the basic liberties, concerned with the right to hold public office, the right to affect the outcome of national elections and so on. For these liberties, Rawls requires that citizens should be not only formally but also substantively equal. That is, citizens who are similarly endowed and motivated should have similar opportunities to hold office, to influence elections, and so on regardless of how rich or poor they are. This fair value proviso has major implications for how elections should be funded and run, as will be discussed below.



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Rawls's second principle of justice has two parts. The first part, fair equality of opportunity, requires that citizens with the same talents and willingness to use them have the same educational and economic opportunities regardless of whether they were born rich or poor. "In all parts of society there are to be roughly the same prospects of culture and achievement for those similarly motivated and endowed"

The second part of the second principle is the difference principle, which regulates the distribution of wealth and income. Allowing inequalities of wealth and income can lead to a larger social product: higher wages can cover the costs of training and education, for example, and can provide incentives to fill jobs that are more in demand. The difference principle allows inequalities of wealth and income, so long as these will be to everyone's advantage, and specifically to the advantage of those who will be worst off. The difference principle requires, that is, that any economic inequalities be to the greatest advantage of those who are advantaged least.

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATION**

Rawls's conception of society is defined by fairness: social institutions are to be fair to all cooperating members of society, regardless of their race, gender, religion, class of origin, natural talents, reasonable conception of the good life, and so on.

Intelligence and reputation isn't based on a person's financial capability, nationality or race – but rather on the person's skills and abilities which are the things that should be given more attention.

At the end of the day, everyone who lives in the Philippines are all the same. It is the people who builds barriers and distance themselves away from each other.

The truth is, no language is inferior or superior to another. Diversity is, after all, what makes our country unique and attractive to many people around the world. Many Filipinos are bilingual or even multilingual because the country boasts more than 100 languages or dialects. We should all be proud of all of our languages.

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