

## F. Sionil Jose's Lecture On UP and the Nationalist Revolution

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I agree with our distinguished lecturer and National Artist, Francisco Sionil Jose, that mass poverty is the biggest problem of Philippine society today. The poverty of our people, he says, is the result of three factors: the loss of our “ethical moorings,” our lack of a “sense of nation,” and the betrayal by our leaders of the people’s interest. Let’s look at his argument more closely.

I have a little problem with the term “ethical moorings,” which I take to mean the same thing as the word “values.” To speak of “moorings” is to suggest that a people’s relation to the world must be fixed. Yet all values change, some faster than others, reflecting the changing circumstances in which human beings make their lives. Frankie would be hard-pressed to define what these basic ethical moorings that have been lost are, and to explain why he thinks we need them in these times. I am quite certain that for every ethical ideal he proposes, ten different others will come to mind. And there would be no objective way of deciding which ethical ideals are more important to Filipinos than others.

My own view is that values are in the final analysis a society’s defense and necessity, their ultimate objective being the preservation and growth of the community over time. Some values are worth strengthening, while others need to be discarded – depending on whether they promote or threaten the survival of the nation in changing times.

I think that a nation's core values must help its people not only to survive but also to grow and mature as a community. Two things come to mind when we talk of growth: *first*, the capacity to feed ourselves and take care of our people's needs without having to rely on other nations; and *second*, the ability to govern ourselves and set our own goals as a nation. The first is self-reliance; the second is autonomy. They are interrelated: a dependent nation can never hope to be free.

Have our values as a people helped us to grow? Or is it the loss of our ancestors' values that arrested our growth? If it is the latter, as Frankie suggests, I would be interested to know what these are that we have lost, and how their loss has made us poor.

"Sense of nation" is another one of those concepts that are difficult to pin down. I am more comfortable with notions like "national pride" or "national esteem" and the extent to which this is strengthened or eroded in the course of a nation's history. I also believe that Filipino national pride has diminished greatly since the formation of the Filipino nation. Today this is most manifest in the continuous migration of demoralized and disenchanted Filipinos who feel betrayed and see no hope for themselves and their children in these shores. Not to look back, rejection, anger - these are reactions of émigrés who think they must peel off the history of their nation from their bodies before they can begin an entirely new life in their chosen country. This is a form of violence upon the self that often enough some Filipino immigrants also try to inflict on their children by erasing any trace of the Filipino in their hearts.

It is not the simple loss of sense of nation that I worry about, but rather the loss of pride in one's nation. In the global age, it is no longer unusual to live and work abroad and remain a national of one's country of birth. There is no need to apologize for leaving one's country, just as there is no need to reject it in anger as a condition for one's happiness as an immigrant.