

MESSAGES

Third World Studies Center 20th Anniversary Gathering

Just a few weeks ago, some of us met at the 10th Anniversary Gathering of the Coalition for Peace at the Ateneo de Manila University campus. Today, some of us are once again meeting to commemorate not 10 but 20 years of the Third World Studies Center. (Ang tagal na pala!)

It is almost frightening to think how often we meet nowadays to look back and commemorate, to remember past initiatives. However (and perhaps, this is a function of the passing years and – the wisdom one supposedly acquires in that passage). These occasions also provide us with an opportunity to reflect on their relevance and how to refashion them into the instruments Or institutions they were truly meant to serve,

The Third World Studies Center (then with Randy and Temy, among others, at the helm) afforded me some space when I first came sack to the Philippines from Latin America and then, Amnesty International in 1981. For that, I am grateful. At the Center, had a chair (a wooden, rot so sturdy chair, I may add) that represented for me at that time the possibility of relating our efforts to oust the dictatorship with similar struggles of peoples in other lands (particularly Central and South America, Asia and Africa). I recall how proud I felt when the posters I carried all the way from Nicaragua and El Salvador, Guatemala and Chile, Bolivia and Colombia, as well as Angola and Mozambique and East Timor slowly found their way into the walls of the fourth floor corner that was home to the TWSC.

Secondly, it was a space for no-holds barred discussions on all sorts of themes and then provided especially for our students spaces for dialogue where understanding as well as friendships were fostered. During that period, I recall our enthusiasm for the culture of resistance as expressed in art, music and film at home and in other countries seeking to free themselves from a series of seemingly unending dictatorships. While exploring alternative ways forward to build a “nation for our children” – to borrow a revered phrase from one who, to me, epitomized what the Center stood for.

When the dictatorship fell, the Center equally evolved and took in under its roof the concerns of those who advocated human rights, women’s

rights, environment, freedom from debt, popular participation, sustainable development, social movements, indigenous peoples and, in general, critical thinking in a rapidly changing world that perhaps was best symbolized by the twin events of the withdrawal of the US military bases and the dismantling of the Berlin Wall.

Since then, the Center has had several incarnations revealing its capacity to reflect the requirements of people it tried to serve and the interests of the people who run the institution. But let me leave it at that to share a thought or two.

First, the relevance of the Center is that it has evolved with the core concerns of changing in turbulent times. What I have always found inspiring about the Center is that it has never desisted from addressing the main concerns of societies in transition nor has it shirked away from providing a forum to debate the most controversial issues of the day.

Secondly, what seems to me to be most valuable is the space the Center provides for fellows and students alike to read reflect, research and discuss. Spaces for reflection and spaces for dialogue are important in this season of “second winds” as Ging Deles and Randy put it at the Coalition for Peace’s anniversary gathering. In this campus and perhaps it, other undertakings, second wind might as well be the prelude to renewed seasons of grace.

Lastly, the capacity of the Center to bring together a disparate hand of people with different ideas, styles, energy levels or intensities, and different approaches to life is one that must be celebrated. Diversity has been the Center’s trademark although focus has been its unique strength. I am proud to have been part of the Center, and even as I straddle more years than five decades, would still feel at home in one of the Center’s comfortable wooden chairs, undoubtedly among the most sought after chairs in the campus.

Ed Garcia