



FORUM 1

Rapporteur's Report

Is the University of the Philippines (UP) being used in a project of historical revisionism to politically rehabilitate the Marcoses? This is one of the questions discussed in the first of a series of fora entitled “*Marcos Pa Rin! Ang mga Pamana at Sumpa ng Rehimeng Marcos (Marcos Still! The Legacy and the Curse of the Marcos Regime)*” on the issues and interests involved in the renaming of the UP College of Business Administration (CBA) to Cesar E.A. Virata School of Business. The forum featured a panel of three professors and an alumnus of the former CBA who all experienced firsthand the glory and horrors of the authoritarian regime of former president Ferdinand E. Marcos.

Ricardo T. Jose, director of the Third World Studies Center and professor at the Department of History, College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, UP Diliman, underscored in his opening remarks the relevance of the forum as a good and, apparently, the first opportunity in the university to discuss this issue from different vantage points. One problem he mentioned was related to the existing protocol on naming (physical) structures as there were no clear rules on naming institutions and academic programs, making it a gray area. Being a fairly recent issue, he traced the chronology of the college's renaming, beginning with the unanimous decision of the former CBA to rename in July 2012 until their formal request to the UP Board of Regents, the highest decision-making body of the university, in March 2013. He noted the position of UP Diliman chancellor Caesar Saloma on the need for clear guidelines on the renaming of academic institutions and academic programs, especially after people who are still alive. Another problem was the consideration of the role of former prime minister Cesar Enrique Aguinaldo Virata during the Marcos regime from which Jose perceived a “shortness” of memory among Filipinos.

HONOR AND EXCELLENCE

The first speaker, Judy Taguiwalo, professor at the Department of Women and Development Studies, College of Social Work and Community Development in UP Diliman, served as a faculty regent of UP and was a political prisoner during martial law. Her talk focused on the renaming of the college in the context of contemporary developments in the university. She pointed out these three primary issues: a) honoring individuals loyal to the Marcos dictatorship; b) naming academic units after persons who are still alive; and c) the decision-making processes of the university in the context of neoliberalism, which has implications on the character of the UP as a public university and on its role in the nation's history.

Taguiwalo proceeded with presenting foremost points raised by certain individuals and groups, highlighting Virata's role in the authoritarian regime. Virata became the prime minister and minister for finance, which, although his prestige as a man of business remains untainted, casted him as the chief loyal technocrat of Marcos who was insensitive to the realities of the Filipino people. Virata enabled the Marcos regime to amass an unprecedented amount of wealth and the country to incur debilitating debts. Reflecting on Virata's place in history, public opinion discerns a project of historical revisionism in the renaming that disrespects the sacrifices of those who fought against the dictatorship, which included living and deceased members of the UP community. Taguiwalo reminded the audience of the university's call for "honor and excellence"—that the latter cannot be divorced from the former.

Taguiwalo reviewed the naming rights policies of the university in particular, based on financial donations. The first mentioned policy of the Board of Regents, dated from 1984, covered physical infrastructure only, not academic units, and considered outstanding alumni for exemplary achievements. This was then widened in scope in 2004 and 2009 with the acknowledgment of then UP president Emerlinda Roman, who also hails from the former CBA, that these financial gifts are important to supplement government funding. Rigoberto Tiglao wrote in a newspaper column that there was even no monetary exchange, as is the practice of other business schools, in the renaming of the CBA. The George Ty-Toyota Hall of Wisdom of the UP Asian Center was cited as the first instance when an edifice in the university was named not after a hero or an academic leader but a corporation.

Taguiwalo declared that this runs against the spirit of a state university. The common practice was to install plaques of appreciation in prominent places in the built structure but not to name the whole institution. An example given was the major donation of the Spanish government, which was named "Sentro Optalmolohiko Jose Rizal ng PGH (Jose Rizal Ophthalmological Center of the Philippine General Hospital)," and not called, as quipped by Taguiwalo, "Spanish Government Ophthalmological Center." The Board of Regents guidelines explicitly mention that the donation should be made in favor of the university and for meritorious conditions, among other stipulations such as the person honored must have exemplary achievements, a sterling reputation, and be looked upon as a role model by the youth. Notwithstanding these, Taguiwalo remarked that the current trend in naming in exchange for financial resources is part of the ongoing privatization of UP as a public university.

The second speaker, Nelson Navarro, is an alumnus of the former CBA and a columnist of the *Philippine Star*. He does not want to be identified with the Cesar E.A. Virata School of Business even if it was Virata himself as CBA dean who signed his diploma back in 1968. Navarro shared Department of History professor Maria Serena Diokno's view that naming should come fifty years after death when people could better examine the "intrinsic worth" of the person than through immediate assessments that are still colored by present emotions, sycophant praises, and ardent criticisms. He remarked that the law on naming has been repeatedly abused following the inclination of the Marcoses to name various institutions after themselves.

Unlike former president Fidel V. Ramos and former senator Juan Ponce Enrile, as Navarro observed, Virata stood with the Marcos government up until the end and still justifies his involvement up to now. Navarro rejected the argument that without the involvement of the technocrats, the Philippines might have been in a worse state. He found a parallel in the testimonies of Hitler's minions in the Nuremberg trials and said that Virata and others were lucky they were spared in the bloodless revolution of 1986.

Going back to the early days of the Marcos period, Navarro chided UP in its intimate complicity with the regime. He said that the university "loved" former president Marcos as an example of what a UP alumnus should be. Marcos effectively recruited the best and brightest from the university as exemplified by former UP presidents Onofre D.

Corpuz and Carlos P. Romulo and members of the then-CBA faculty, such as Jaime Laya and Manuel Alba.

Navarro pondered, with a technocracy that received topnotch education from abroad, a nation that ranked second to Japan, and a people's reputation for not just being rich but also glamorous in the 1960s, why then did the Marcos government fail? He placed the blame squarely on the UP colleges of business and law, calling them the twin pillars of the dictatorship. Virata, as the government's point man for multilateral funders, together with his team of business graduates, negotiated all the foreign loans. These, Navarro scrutinized, were only used by Marcos to steal and not to industrialize; thus, no economic progress was achieved. As for the College of Law, he cited senator Edgardo Angara, Atty. Estelito Mendoza, and the UP Law Center for their contributions to the regime, especially in the formulation of decrees.

Navarro went on to echo the sentiment of the late UP law professor Haydee Yorac regarding the importance of ethics, social responsibility, and working toward collective ends among the university's graduates. He lamented the profound dysfunction in the university, which was initially created to serve US colonial interests as the capstone of the education system, in that the dissident tradition which began during the UP presidency of Rafael Palma is now being lost. He emphatically said that if the people will not learn from the past and will not "impale the monsters" who have exploited the nation, then the country is doomed to repeat the same mistakes and even deserves the second thrashing.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND AGRARIAN REFORM

The third speaker, Eduardo Tadem, professor at the Asian Center, UP Diliman, delivered a paper that was part of a research project on the Marcos technocrats. His paper looked at the role of Cesar Virata in rural development in general and in agrarian reform in particular.

A cornerstone of the regime's New Society program, agrarian reform has been noted by scholars as a colossal failure. Tadem claimed this to be the case because the development paradigm pursued by Marcos and his technocrats was biased toward the elite and big business interests rather than distributive justice and equity-based principles that supposedly underpinned the program. Possessing mindsets honed abroad and in the corporate world that viewed human beings as mere

cogs in the social machinery, the technocrats, Tadem stressed, came around to rationalize martial law as a way to jumpstart economic development similar to the neighboring countries of Taiwan, Singapore, and Thailand, which had authoritarian governments already in place. This resulted in only 2.2 percent of the target land area for distribution, despite Marcos being in absolute power for thirteen years and four months. Some of the factors that led to the failure of agrarian reform included the bureaucracy's conservative vision, lack of political will, patronage and corruption, the organization of the program around landowners and not tenants, increasing production costs, and the failure of the small farmer credit program. This includes the inadequacies of the Land Bank of the Philippines, specifically the stage of land valuation wherein the largest number of backlogs was registered. Landbank was created for the purpose of agrarian reform but was later converted into a universal bank. Virata headed the bank at that time. This, according to Tadem, was a pivotal mistake, as it was against the well-intentioned design of its first governor Sixto K. Roxas Jr.

With all its vaunted expertise and methods, Tadem noted, including a state apparatus that was unencumbered by institutional restraints and checks on its political power, the Marcos-Virata development paradigm remains a failure. What was successful though, Tadem observed, was the corporate farming program—the direct opposite of land reform where the entry of multinationals exacerbated inequalities and was more disruptive to peasants. It covered a total area that was 445 percent greater than the land transferred under agrarian reform. Tadem, citing Marcos's reason behind the agrarian reform law, confirmed the notion that the basic motivation behind land reform was counterinsurgency. Virata's involvement with the corporate world would continue well after the fall of the dictatorship as Tadem reflected on the revolving-door practice between capitalist businesses and the government.

In closing, Tadem repeated the views of economist Joseph Stiglitz, "economic policies are not neutral but ideological." He warned the audience that technocrats are not to be trusted.

The last speaker was Amado Mendoza Jr., professor at the Department of Political Science, College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, UP Diliman. Another political prisoner of martial law and a reporter who covered the finance beat, he observed for himself the fine qualities of Virata as a gentleman. Despite this, Mendoza considered him as representing the soft side of the dictatorship and

stressed the leading role of Virata in the acquisition of “jumbo loans.” These foreign loans were contracted through the then Central Bank with sovereign guarantee. The main beneficiaries were local business interests with close ties to the Marcoses. When these interests failed to pay for the loans, since they were guaranteed by the government, public money were used to pay for them.

Connecting the renaming issue to contemporary political developments, Mendoza wondered if this might be a trial balloon under a larger project of political rehabilitation, particularly of the Marcos family name on a national level. This rewriting of history, he projected, may be in support of moves for a possible presidential run by Senator Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. in the near future. Mendoza pointed out the battle of narratives framed along the lines of Marcos versus Aquino with one side feeding off the dissatisfaction on past governments, including the then Aquino administration, and a sense of nostalgia for the discipline and order under the Marcos regime.

Mendoza, as a political scientist and with the thought that the university is a major battleground for capturing the public imagination, wondered what other stakeholders, such as students and alumni, can do to create a critical mass to give a meaningful counter opinion to the renaming of the former CBA.

OPEN FORUM

The primary concerns expressed in the open forum could be grouped under three main themes. The first would be the continuing struggle against the dictatorship and the efforts to rewrite history. Students of political science, history, and business asked what the implications of the renaming would be and what they could do, especially those who were not born during the Marcos era. Navarro reminded the young audience of the need for constant vigilance and of the collective responsibility to fight the enemies of truth and freedom. He stressed that one does not have to be an activist, political, or ideological to guard the country against martial law. One only has to have common sense. Members of the faculty likewise mentioned current efforts to appeal the renaming through the sectoral regents and signing petitions.

The second theme is the process of the renaming of the academic unit, which, despite the proposal undergoing legal channels and being endorsed by both the UP president and the UP Diliman chancellor, did not go through the University Council, the highest academic body

that has the authority to approve changes in academic matters. Taguiwalo contended that this was another move by the Virata School of Business faculty, whose senior faculty member was in power in UP for around sixteen years, to further atomize the university community.

UP Diliman chancellor Caesar Saloma, while endorsing the request of the college, drew attention to the letter he wrote about the need to formulate a minimum set of criteria on renaming institutions after living persons as a guide for possible initiatives in the future. He assured the audience that his administration practices transparency, fairness, and predictability in the management of the university.

The last theme is about democratic community discourse. The speakers, members of the audience, and organizers expressed disappointment on the lack of a representative from the Virata School of Business to explain their side to the UP community. According to Jose, the Third World Studies Center kept on looking, up to the last minute, for a possible speaker from the side of the college. Virata himself was invited to speak at the forum. He respectfully declined due to various commitments and that he deemed it inappropriate to appear in such a forum. He said his record of service to the country is public knowledge and as such should speak for itself.

As there were no representatives from the now Cesar E.A. Virata School of Business, the question of what motivated the college to rename itself was left unanswered. According to Navarro, however, the proponents of the initiative could not take refuge behind due process and bureaucratic procedures. The college, he argued, must defend the renaming in a democratic setting. For Mendoza, this issue is part of the continuing struggle to write and rewrite the history of the dictatorship; a struggle, that for the likes of him who survived the martial law years, he thought was over. It was not. ❀—NEX BENGSÓN

MARIA LUISA T. CAMAGAY, professor, Department of History, College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, UP Diliman served as the forum's moderator.

