

## **PLENARY SESSION V**

### **"GOVERNANCE, CIVIL SOCIETY, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE"**

#### **DEMOCRATIZING METHODOLOGIES IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES: SURVEY RESEARCH IN THE PHILIPPINES**

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#### **A. THE INVISIBLE PUBLIC IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL SCIENCE INQUIRY**

One could be uneasy as regards contemporary studies of most critical social phenomena in developing countries like the Philippines. There is little direct participation of the public in these treatises by social scientists. Society's key structures, institutions, processes, and other crucial concerns are rarely examined from the vantage point of public perceptions and sentiments. Even as scholars regularly attribute specific ideas and views to the public in reading and representing a country's history, critical times, and crucial national issues, their databases usually exclude material directly culled from the people through survey research.

Political stability, economic viability, and social cohesion (or their corresponding negations) are assiduously related to the relative strength, willfulness, and effectiveness of key political and economic actors, or influential institutions and sectoral groups dynamically interacting within and beyond the nation. The people themselves, often politically and economically marginalized, mostly lacking in social stature, are easily missed and, at times, could be willfully ignored by impatient or elitist academics.

Several reasons could account for this academic neglect. First, academic tradition has a way of perpetuating itself. Scholars who have gotten used to certain modes of analysis (e.g., legal-institutional, historical, and case studies among

others) become comfortable with them and it takes much effort to accommodate others, particularly those involving extensive quantitative analysis and, perhaps even more formidable to some academics, direct interaction with the public. Political scientists and economists in developing countries, for instance, rarely have a developed tradition of survey research or extensive fieldwork and most rely on readily available data furnished by at times manipulative government agencies and private institutions.

Second, survey research or public opinion surveys could be high-risk propositions in many developing countries. The political sensibilities of authorities, specially those without much public support, are often overly developed and academics monitoring the public pulse on sensitive sociopolitical and economic issues could easily get into trouble. In martial law Philippines, survey research was not quite the preferred method of social inquiry, neither encouraged by the vigilant authorities nor favored by prudential academics. By law, anyone doing survey interviews was supposed to register with some government agency and furnish copies of survey design and field questionnaires in advance. Academic surveys probing the political sentiments of Filipinos languished during the Marcos years. Only as the authoritarian regime weakened in the early 1980s did political surveys pick up. Within the ASEAN region, public opinion surveys of political and economic concerns still have not been regularly conducted except in the Philippines and only by a rather small number of academic researchers.

Third, public opinion surveys could also be prohibitively costly for academics without substantial institutional support. In the Philippines, for instance, national surveys involving samples of 1200 to 1500 respondents currently require well over a million pesos per round. Except for the Social Weather Stations (a small, non-governmental, academic group) no Philippine institution has been able to sustain a survey research capability demanding this level of financial outlay at least four times a year. Neither Marcos' Philippine Center for Advanced Studies (PCAS) of the 1970s and its successor in the 1980s, the President's Center for Special Studies (PCSS), nor the various government and private sector think-tanks in the later Aquino and Ramos administrations developed in-house capabilities for systematic and regular opinion surveys on the most crucial concerns of political and economic governance. Academic institutions themselves have also shied away from this capability build-up. Even the country's financially best-endowed academic institution (the University of the Philippines with a state budget of over PhP2 billion in 1994) lacks the institutional capability for regularly monitoring the public pulse.

## **B. DEMOCRATIZING THE SOCIAL SCIENCES' DATABASES**

Of course, public opinion surveys or more generally speaking, survey research probes are not altogether absent in academic and quasi-academic probes of Philippine conditions. Social science practitioners in many government agencies

(e.g., the Department of Labor, the National Economic and Development Authority, the Department of Health, the Department of Agrarian Reform, the Food and Nutrition Research Center, and the National Statistics Office, among others) have run various socioeconomic and demographic surveys across the years, as their respective agency needs dictated. Social scientists in private sector groups have been quite active in undertaking market surveys of market segmentation, consumer profiles, and product preferences. Social scientists in universities and colleges also include survey research in their repertoire of methodological capabilities. All these social science professionals have undertaken survey research in one form or another.

The issue then is not really whether survey research is being done by social scientists in this country, but on what issues it focuses on and whether it is applied to these issues with sufficient regularity. In assessing the impact or influence of social science (in particular survey research or public opinion surveys) on public policy, it makes a lot of difference whether one is taking about issues like high-end, consumer-product positioning, and real estate opportunities or, alternatively, regime legitimacy, national trends in poverty and crime incidence rates, public satisfaction with the country's political institutions, public officials, and the major administration programs, or long-term sociodemographic concerns like overall demographic trends, values formation, life cycles, human rights, gender and environmental issues, or even singularly dramatic concerns like the 1995 rice crisis or, in the same year, the tragic execution of a Filipina contract worker in Singapore.

On practically all of the important national concerns listed above, Filipino social scientists and their government and private sector counterparts have not done enough survey research. In addition to reasons explored in the initial section of this paper, the inadequate utilization of this methodology may also be traced to the lack of an institutional, long-term research agenda which systematically prioritizes and coordinates the efforts of social scientists involved in integrative or team research. The absence of this programmatic research plan is itself traceable to some academic idiosyncrasies in this country. With few exceptions, Filipino social scientists appear to be overly individualistic, not quite inclined to conceptualizing and undertaking collaborative research. In other cases, an *ad hoc* orientation to research prevails, abetted by the gross reality of market-driven research even in the most reputable academic institutions within the country. Fund availability, not the intrinsic merit of socially imperative concerns, channels the research energies of many Filipino social scientists. As a result, researchers hop, skip, and jump from one research topic to another, largely ignoring serious considerations for deepening subject expertise and the logical need for long-term research continuity.

The national social science situation is not completely hopeless. The upside is that, given current Philippine developments, a premium has been irreversibly placed on situating the people in social science inquiries. Political democratization

demands hearing from the general public, if not quite acting yet upon what is heard from them. Social liberation has contributed to the political empowerment of traditionally marginalized groups like the women and the Muslims. Economic growth also has spurred some social conscientization such that the equity claims of the historically poor can expect more than the usual rhetorical, tongue-in-cheek political responses. All of these developments augur well for social science methodologies which allow for a more democratized approach to understanding Philippine society and its underlying dynamics. Social scientists as well as the controlling elites in this country have never been as propitiously positioned as at present should they decide to really hear from, seriously listen to, and not simply tell the people. Survey research is arguably one of the most effective hearing aids available to those who would democratize not only the bases of various social science discourses but of society itself.

### C. SURVEY RESEARCH'S IMPACT ON PUBLIC POLICY

On publicly acknowledged high saliency issues, some social scientists are currently able to influence the course of public policy by directly communicating their survey findings to the highest authorities. These privileged academics regularly provide briefings for the President and his Cabinet, both chambers of Congress and other major government agencies. Post-Marcos political administrations have become quite sensitive to public opinion and popular sentiments which now readily reach, and are often magnified by, an exuberant media. By way of an illustration, in October 1995, President Ramos, no less, responded energetically to the rice crisis when survey findings indubitably showed that Filipinos were holding him directly responsible for the rice shortage. (No other president, not even Marcos at the height of the EDSA challenge, suffered so much and such direct public criticism as Ramos during this period.) In the same year, President Ramos also quickly accepted the resignation of two Cabinet members when surveys showed severely critical public sentiments in the course of a Filipina worker's criminal conviction and execution in Singapore.

Public opinion findings have also spurred some controversial policy initiatives. In 1992, the Ramos administration committed to a policy of population regulation which surveys showed was already mostly acceptable to the public but which an influential religious hierarchy considered immoral and hence vigorously opposed.

Survey data have been put to other pragmatic uses. Government officials frequently cite public opinion surveys in justifying their proposed agency budgets in Congressional hearings, defending specific agency programs and, at times, even taking media to task for the latter's alleged tendencies to misinform and sensationalize.

Public opinion data now inform policy discussions and decisions in the various departments of Foreign Affairs, Justice, Transportation and Communica-

tion, Health, Education and Culture, Agrarian Reform, Agriculture, Tourism, National Defense, the National Security Council, as well as many local governments and specific public officials. On many high-visibility issues such as the traffic condition in Metro Manila, the pollution of Boracay, the Kuratong Baleleng Case, the PEA-Amari case, and a host of other concerns, the responsible authorities had the benefit of knowing what the public sentiments were as they fashioned policy responses to these concerns.

Arguably the greatest impact of survey research (or more specifically public opinion surveys) is registered in the process of electing public officials. Less than 15 years ago, it was possible to assess electoral contests and their probable results without once using the word "survey". Since 1992, "public opinion polls," and "surveys" have become part of the standard vocabulary of anyone who would presume to analyze national elections in this country. The most powerful political figures and the best-endowed campaign financiers seriously include survey findings in their choice of whom to support and whom to abandon among candidates aiming for the highest political positions. In 1998, all the major presidential campaigns reflected much sensitivity to the influence survey findings wield in the determination of electoral outcomes. It is not improbable that in the 2001 and 2004 national elections, all the serious contenders for national positions will try to avail themselves of the technical expertise professional pollsters and political scientists, among other social scientists, have.

#### **D. CAVEATS FOR THE SURVEYING SOCIAL SCIENTISTS**

At this stage, survey methodologies and their findings need to be more responsibly clarified not only to the general public or the policymakers, but also to most of the social scientists themselves. Without providing basic education on what surveys are, how legitimately and competently they could be done, what they can and cannot do, how they could be manipulated and perverted by the unprincipled and the irresponsible, this social science technology can be as hazardous to a democratizing body politic as any explosive device would be to any organic entity.

Without sufficient education regarding the nature and limitations of surveys, at best those exposed to it would treat it as an object of religious devotion, inspiring much fanaticism sustained by awe-inspiring ignorance. On the other hand, there would be based essentially on the same ground. (Many of our politicians and media people are already fanatically for or against surveys, but either way most are ill-informed about this social science tool.)

A final note must be sounded. Public opinion surveys, particularly those that relate to electoral campaigns, are a sunrise industry in the Philippines. In the last elections alone, both local and foreign polling groups started sprouting like mushrooms after a particularly generous shower. Social scientists without firm academic commitments will be grossly tempted to compromise their professional

ethics for material considerations which even those in the business sector would consider substantial enough. Times like these, those in the social sciences must exert extra effort in reminding themselves that what is needed is not a juicy contract for a compromised public opinion survey, but a rigorous evaluation of what a social scientist irrevocably loses in giving up his academic soul.\*

### **ANNEX: SUMMARY NOTES ON SOCIAL SCIENTISTS AND PUBLIC POLICY**

The interface between academic discourse and public policy traditionally has generated the most partisan as well as the most anguished discussions among academics and, at times, between academics and those who actually govern and execute public policy. Far too often, academics have hurled charges at each other, some accusing others of working far too readily and comfortably with government and its various agencies, for betraying their professional commitments and prostituting their technical skills for material or political gains. On the other hand, other academics and most policymakers have condemned those who would stay aloof in their "ivory towers," unmindful of society's critical need for highly skilled citizens to help run a government, manage a national economy and, more generally speaking, undertake collaborative work with those who actually govern.

There are also academics who try to assume a middle ground between these two groups and undertake "critical collaboration" with policy-makers. While lending their professional and technical skills to government agencies, these academics claim to remain essentially independent-minded, maintaining some distance from the policymakers and quick to leave the latter should their academic integrity be threatened in any real or imagined way.

Among academics, the question of what makes social scientists extremely useful to the political authorities has been addressed in numerous fora, including disciplinally defined professional meetings. However, their often erudite discussions generally skirt the sensitive issue of the character of the discourses employed by social scientists among themselves and, even more critically, towards the regime authorities as academics effectively serve or betray the legitimate interests of their societies. This focus does not exclude inquiries into the social scientists' substantive knowledge base and their personal contributions to that base, but it underscores the realities of how social scientists relate to each other and interact with those who are formally tasked with a society's governance.

\*An annex, "Summary Notes On Social Scientists and Public Policy," has been added to this paper precisely to help Filipino social scientists explore the nature of academic commitments, the historical and political contexts of academic orientations and alternative social science discourses, and possible frameworks within which one might try to understand, perhaps even evaluate, the roles played by Filipino social scientists in strengthening, sustaining, or weakening national political regimes in the last one hundred years.

(In a lighter vein, one might note the etymology of the term "discourse" and be reminded that it comes from the Latin "*discurrere*" or "to run about". How social scientists "run about" within their disciplines and across others, with what kind of methodologies and jargons to facilitate or obstruct mutual comprehension and active collaboration among themselves and how, beyond themselves, given certain considerations, they also "run about" with the authorities in the making of public policies – this can tell us much about how Filipino social scientists discharge their academic functions not only as they should but as they actually have and probably would continue to do so in the years to come.)

Powerful intellects have actually designed models of utopian societies where economic security, political stability, and societal development turned on the conjunction of philosophy and politics, philosophers and kings, influential academics, and political decisionmakers. In perhaps the most radical model devised by thinkers of this utopian school, philosophers indeed would be kings. (It is of course highly instructive that Plato, after a sobering tutorial experience with a local tyrant, chose to leave his model republic, "a pattern laid up in the stars," where it rightly belongs and later pragmatically concerned himself with a more earthly regime, one where the laws and other institutions govern through recognizably human political leaders.)

All over the world, many people with claims to knowledge and technical/professional expertise have consorted with those who have political power and directly exercise governance functions. As in the case of presumably indispensable natural scientists, social scientists too increasingly have been tapped to assist in the maintenance and enhancement of political regimes. Lawyers, economists, political scientists, sociologists, demographers, historians, anthropologists, psychologists, and mass communication experts, among others, have been conscripted into regime crusades which political authorities eagerly mount and jealously lead. By whatever shibboleth these campaigns are advertised (e.g., "pacification," "nationalism," "national development," "national security," "modernization," "sustainable economic development," or "serving the people"), social scientists have become veritable phalanxes of these contemporary political crusades.

The Philippines has not been an exception to the general case. In this country, the social sciences and their professionals (teachers, researchers, and other practitioners) have been often engaged in the service of political governance and public administration. Even a cursory review of the various social science disciplines in the past 100 years reveals that whatever the political regime and whoever the regime controllers might be, enough Filipino social scientists have collaborated with the political authorities with, one might add, mixed results for the public and its legitimate interests.

Without naively saddling these social scientists with the sole responsibility for the authorities' governance policies, they nevertheless have helped actively shape the country's general political culture and its effective political regime, its legal framework, economic structural base, and the overall system of Filipino

societal opportunities, rewards and penalties. Filipino social scientists, much like their counterparts in other countries, have thus contributed significantly to the historical as well as the contemporary resolutions of the basic political concern: *Who gets what, where, when and how?*

In 1998, this fundamental issue could be reformulated in various ways even as the social scientists confronting it apply their individual professional skills and academic talents. Political scientists could look into the political system's confluence of formal and dynamic properties (assessing whether the gap between the two has been narrowing or widening over time, with what specific implications for overall regime legitimacy, political stabilization, democratization and social justice); economists might inquire into the comparative efficiency of the national economy and its various sectors, the nature of its linkages with the global economic system and, perhaps most crucially, its distributive or equity concerns within the nation; anthropologists and sociologists might dissect the operational properties and the dynamic processes of Philippine cultures and the value matrices of Philippine society; psychologists could provide valuable insights into the operational underpinnings of both social and individual behavior, the presumably "normal" as well as the clearly aberrant and their implications for national collective efforts. Historians have a specially critical role to play, to assist in the deepening and retention of a national memory. Indeed, as the Filipino poet Gemino H. Abad reinventing Santayana was moved to say, a nation is only as good as its memory. The political scientist O.D. Corpuz, a historian in his own right, has presented this country with a truly excellent centennial gift. His two-volume work, *The Roots of the Filipino Nation*, is, to date, probably the most impressive Filipino nationalist treatise (and tract, for despite the Corpuz' quietly eloquent style, the work nevertheless reminds one of Machiavelli's emotional appeal to his fellow Italians as the latter concludes *The Prince*).

Taking this crucial interaction between Filipino social scientists and political actors as a historical given, an inquiry into the nature of social science discourses and how they have impacted or influenced public policy is sorely needed in a nation celebrating its centennial. This probe could be facilitated if the following questions initially guided those who would explore the wherefores of social science and social scientists in relation to policymaking and the authorities who make public policies:

1. *The nature of academic work:* What is an academic commitment and specifically, a social scientist's academic commitment? Within the specific professional disciplines of the social sciences, are there ethical practices that serve to strengthen or to weaken the academic commitment? In the political realm, are there conditions/situations which constrain the liberal pursuit of an academic commitment?

2. *The historical contexts of academic orientations:* In the case of Philippine social science, what historical conditions could have influenced the development of specific social science disciplines such that particular discourses (para-



digms, theories, and modes of analysis) became naturally favored or were ostracized within the disciplines? Did Filipino academics who pursued graduate work in largely Western institutions uncritically develop the same saliency orientations of their foreign trainers? As regards foreign institutions which supported institution-building and human resource (faculty) development programs, were their institutional agenda largely consonant with what objective Philippine conditions indicated really needed to be done? Did Philippine institutions pursuing human development programs have a strategic sense of how their returning trained social scientists need re-integrating into underdeveloped institutional environments, with mostly meager physical and financial resources, even as they would be assiduously sought (or, in corporate language, "pirated") by other, materially much better-endowed and better-endowing institutions in society?

3. *The politics of academic discourse:* Regarding specific political realities, to what extent did foreign or imperialist political control condition the development of specific discourses in the social sciences? Is the preference for legalistic analyses of political institutions and social situations traceable to the understandable animosity of imperial authorities for far more revealing and possibly inciting political and sociological analyses?

4. *Martial law and Filipino social scientists:* What effects did Marcos' martial law administration have on the independence and integrity of social science discourses and specific social science discourses and specific social scientists? Did Marcos' authoritarian regime succeed in conscripting reputable Filipino social scientists and turning them into handmaidens and apologists of the Marcos administration? Whatever happened to Marcos-funded, fairly extensive policy studies done by Filipino social scientists during this period?

5. *Post-Marcos political regimes and Filipino social scientists:* As a matter of fact, have social scientists had much more success in pursuing critical collaboration with the authorities in the post-Marcos period? How influential indeed have academic policy studies been in the Aquino and Ramos administrations? How much influence do social scientists now exercise in the Estrada administration and what is the overall quality of that influence? What indicators might be designed and actively used to reliably gauge the influence social scientists have in relation to policymaking?

6. *Alternative social science discourses in traditional and non-traditional venues:* Are there significant alternative social science discourses, conducted within or beyond the academic institutions, say in non-governmental organizations, and what have been their track records in informing, sustaining, assailing, and improving public policies?

7. *Towards a truly more independent and a more capable social science in the Philippines:* What needs to be done to promote further competence and greater independence within the social sciences as they continue to perform their academic functions in collaboration with governmental agencies? What specific recommendations might be considered to increase the probability that social scien-

tists remain fairly independent in the way they assess sociopolitical and economic realities? What can be done such that, even as social scientists labor with political actors in addressing society's concerns, they do not confuse their academic commitment and public duty with serving to please influential political patrons? How many eminent social scientists given a cabinet post failed to make this crucial distinction and allowed themselves to be partners in the deliberate misrepresentation of political and economic conditions to their people?

There are many more concerns which could be added to the ones listed above. In the course of numerous academic discussions, these other considerations will definitely eventually surface and in due time will probably be satisfactorily addressed. However, one must hope that it will not take another hundred years before a national consensus develops regarding the necessity of collaboration between academics in the social sciences and the nation's political governors. That consensus must be anchored on the realization that this collaboration benefits Philippine society only if Filipino social scientists clearly understood, and at all times firmly insisted on, their being truly independent-minded, academic workers.

## **GOVERNANCE, CIVIL SOCIETY, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

TERESITA ANG SEE

*Executive Director, KAISA para sa Kaunlaran*

- A working definition of "governance" was provided: The process which any society, through its authorities and institutions, resolves the fundamental question of who gets what, where, and how.
- The role of local communities in the process of governance was underscored.
- Given the Philippine context, among the major issues and concerns surrounding the general concern of governance are the following: promotion of accountabilities, prevention of graft and corruption, preservation of public order and safety, etc. They also include basic concerns such as the provision of basic needs, management of traffic, and garbage disposal.
- Professor Miranda cited continuities in the study of governance. Referring to Huntington, he said that the challenges are basically the same as they were 25 years ago: Will we be governed well, or will we be governed at all? He also said that within the context of Philippine history, continuities are quite observable. The same issues and concerns are raised and studied repeatedly, yet some of the fundamental concerns of good governance remain unaddressed and problems remain.

- Professor Miranda shared some data pertaining to governance. The theme was how the Filipino people would like to resolve the question of governance and how they would like to be governed. Among the questions asked were those relating to the whether democracy is the best political system and in what circumstances; whether authoritarianism was acceptable in some cases; or whether it makes a difference at all. He related the response to these questions to the social class and status of the respondents. Other questions asked were the following:
  - Are you satisfied with the way democracy works in this country?
  - What is the meaning of people empowerment?
  - A comparative status of Freedom of Speech under the Marcos, Aquino, and Ramos governments.
- Another issue raised pertained to the various concerns of governance of the people. These ranged from threats to national security (poverty, graft and corruption, public safety, lack of discipline in the society, economic issues).
- How people rate themselves in terms of poverty had a geographic correlation: Those from the Visayas and Mindanao themselves are worse off relative to those from Luzon and Metro Manila.
- Ms. Teresita Ang See discussed the role of anti-crime NGOs to promote good governance and social justice. As far as she and the groups she represented were concerned, there can be no social justice in an environment of fear, hence the urgency of peace and order, law and order in good governance. She also decried the fact the "crime does pay in this country, and it pays lucratively."
- Ms. Ang See pointed out that anti-crime NGOs have advocated reforms in the various pillars of the criminal justice system: law enforcement, prosecution, courts, and correction pillars.
- During the open forum, questions were raised pertaining to reporting of crime and the status of development. Professor Miranda said that there is a direct correlation between the status of development of a country and the percentage of crime reported: the richer a country is, the higher the tendency to report crimes. Professor Miranda decried the discrepancy in the figures of the National Police Commission and the SWS which "suggest a horrible amount of underreporting."
- Another question raised was about a correlation, if any, between the "level of happiness" of the Filipino people and poverty, considering that the Filipino people were once reported to be among the happiest people in the world. Professor Miranda attributed this to the generally positive outlook of the Filipino who feels that "provided that what I have now will not further deteriorate, I will applaud." The Filipino has so much self-confidence, and also confidence in his leaders.

