

## **Colloquium on Assessing Philippine Democratization and Governance**

1 March 2011, 9 am-1 pm

Frank Lynch SJ Resource Center

### **Highlights of the Q & A/Open Forum**

#### **Part I**

Dr. Emma Porio asked what academics should teach students of political science if, as Prof. Miranda claims, current concepts and measures of democracy – as they are frequently bandied around -- appear not to be appropriate and relevant.

Prof. Miranda clarified that he was not suggesting that the definitions and measures of democracy are incorrect. He said that there are indeed constituent concepts of any democratic theory, whether in pre-modern or contemporary times. He noted, however, that the concepts of popular participation, sovereignty of the people, public accountability, popular representation, etc. are all "living" concepts which must always be read "with the times." He stressed the vital need for a contextual reading of democracy and democratic concepts. The "democracy" of Athens in the 5th century B.C., those of the 19th and 20th centuries and contemporary, 21st century, "democracy" reflect different priority-defining characteristics. The understanding of what must be comprehended by concepts like "people," "elections," "accountability," and "representation," among others, has shown a remarkable tendency towards greater inclusiveness and a greater variety of requisite operationalizations. In contemporary democratic theorizing, an emerging interest in time-framing a democratic definition is already apparent. Even as democratization is properly distinguished from democracy, one being the process towards an end and the other being no less than the end, some theorists are already recommending that the determination of whether a polity is democratic or not must not be time-indeterminate; instead they would impose an explicit, in one case a theorist bats for a thirty-year, historical interval.

To emphasize his point, Prof. Miranda likened the concept of democracy to the concept of poverty. He noted that the definition of poverty in the country has evolved over the years— many Filipino economists, noting the technical complexity of defining and measuring poverty were not even looking at poverty measures in the 70s – a period of martial rule and much academic circumspection. Now, poverty definition and its corresponding measurements in terms of overall family income and food thresholds are available. The government's, particularly the National Statistics Office's, indicators of poverty have also changed over the years, although

people tend to be wary of these measures because of government's penchant for manipulating data to reduce poverty figures and exaggerate its accomplishments. Prof. Miranda said that the sensitive nature of the issues of democracy and poverty has made it more difficult for scholars to study and measure them, but stressed that it is the political rather than the technical constraints that keep some vital concerns from being academically explored. Ideological positions underlying even academic work also often cloud conceptual meanings.

In acknowledging the need for democracy studies at the national level, Prof. Miranda commended the current state of democracy study being attempted by Dr. Edna Co and her team. He said, however, that it would have been ideal had the team consulted other indices like the Israeli Democracy Index and the Economist's Intelligence's Democracy Index in identifying and designing appropriate democracy indicators. He also cautioned against using indices that promote or advance certain ideologies but are not grounded on empirical evidence. In studying democracy, he said that one should look at the conceptual definitions explicitly or implicitly provided, their operationalization, and finally, the hard data that validates them.

Responding to Prof. Miranda's comments, Dr. Edna Co that their state of democracy study was based on the citizens' assessment of democracy and did not subscribe to any ideology nor espouse a single "expert" view. She added that their study of democracy is a work in progress, and experts must continue to learn and at the same time, help educate people.

Mr. Ramon Casiple asked how one should take into account the role of political and economic elites in the study of democracy. He said that one cannot separate actions of political elites from the process of democratization.

Ms. Malou Mangahas agreed that there is a dichotomy between what people think/believe and the actual state of affairs. For instance, Filipinos take pride in the country's high literacy rate, but this is just simple, functional literacy— students are not taught to and have difficulty comparing, analyzing and comprehending. In the same way, people think the Philippines is a democratic country but the actual situation belies this view.

Ms. Mangahas commented that academic researches on the practice of democracy and democratization must reach the public and inform public discussions. She added that more academic researches should be directed towards current concerns so that they can input when it matters. She expressed concern, however, over the bias/partisanship of some academics and said that journalists are conflicted about

how to handle them. Ms. Mangahas also noted that some academics were excellent professors until they joined political parties and became the very architects of shortcuts to democracy.

Prof. Miranda agreed with Dr. Co that educators themselves must be the first targets of education. He said that keeping an open mind and continually learning were among the things he tried to do as an educator in his 47 years at UP and other institutions.

On the role of elites, Prof. Miranda said that there are different kinds of elites, e.g. political, economic, religious and even academic elites. They often have competing interests and ideas. He referred to this as "polyarchy," which literally means "many rulers" but does not, as other scholars appear to have done, equate polyarchy with democracy in all instances. He said that sometimes elites collaborate with each other for ends that are anything but democratic. The important thing, however, is the outcome of elite collaboration: does it converge with or serve the public interest and improve the citizens' quality of life?

With regard to academics participating in public discourse, Prof. Miranda said there are a number of praiseworthy academics who do so through their newspaper columns and TV/radio programs. He cited Prof. Solita Monsod, Prof. Randy David and Fr. Joaquin Bernas, SJ as examples of outstanding public intellectuals. Prof. Miranda agreed with Ms. Mangahas' observation that some academics who joined government as cabinet ministers lost their intellectual rigor and were absorbed by the system.

On the issue of academic researches being "on the ball" so that these become relevant and useful, Prof. Miranda said that academics have a burning need to understand the state of things before jumping into the bandwagon or acting on an issue. He recounted that when he was research head of an activist academic group, the group wanted to organize rallies protesting faculty pay and working conditions without undertaking and publicly offering the relevant study. He said that he strongly objected to this proposal and asked that they finish first a comparative study on faculty pay-scale and work loads to provide a solid basis for the professors' mobilization and mass action. He stressed the importance of intellectual content in any public discourse or action.

Prof. Ronas agreed that the country is dominated by political and economic elites and noted that many have called the country's political structure as an oligarchy rather than democracy. He said that "feckless pluralism" characterizes the kind of

democratization that the country has experienced, where people's participation does not go beyond elections and elites still monopolize decision-making. Prof. Ronas said that this can be countered by promoting participative citizenry.

On whether or not academics should plunge into politics, Prof. Ronas said that Weber had addressed this question long ago— one must draw the line between his/her role as an academic and as a citizen. When one is in the pulpit as an academic, he/she must try to be objective; however, he/she can get out of the pulpit and join street mobilizations as a citizen.

## **Part II**

Ms. Nieves Osorio asked if the study inquired on Filipinos' readiness to support a two-party system.

Ms. Osorio also noted that individuals can belong to several organizations which account for the varying statistics on the number of Filipinos affiliated with civil society organizations (CSOs). She herself had crossed over from government to civil society and belongs to multiple groups. Ms. Osorio mentioned that some of the groups she belongs to had been invited by the government, particularly the Department of Budget and Management, to get involved in the preparation of the national budget. She said that to meaningfully contribute to government efforts, she had suggested mapping out where CSOs that participate in these consultations are located/based and which aspect of the budget they are interested in or their advocacies lie.

Ms. Osorio explained that the reason for the low internal revenue allotment (IRA) during the Estrada administration was that he established a local government equalization fund and it was alleged that local government units (LGUs) that wanted to access this fund have to go through his son. During the Ramos administration, on the other hand, President Ramos fully exercised his power of the purse. She mentioned that there was a provision in the General Appropriations Act which allowed the President to withhold the disbursement of any budget item if the fiscal situation warrants this.

Commissioner Jose Mamauag commented that the road towards attaining full democracy is difficult and democratization is derailed by abuses of human rights, particularly suppression of people's participation and lack of transparency. He asked what the Filipino psyche is with regard to democracy and democratization efforts.

Ms. Mangahas inquired whether it would be appropriate for civil society to join a reform government or keep out and retain its autonomy. She said that the problem with CSOs as well as leaders of these CSOs joining government is that they often forget about their principles and are co-opted by politicians. She cited as an example the last election where party-list groups allowed traditional politicians to 'piggyback' and represent their groups and left-leaning organizations that have historically good advocacies aligned themselves with different presidential candidates so that they could have access to more funds. She said that these groups lied for their political allies and lied about their election spending. Ms. Mangahas said one party list representative from a CSO commented that reputable CSOs have lost their institutional strategic advantage of serving as conscience of the people because of money. Mr. Casiple agreed with the observation of Ms. Mangahas, saying that CSOs have become politicized.

Dr. Rosa Linda Miranda commented that the papers seem to have overlooked the role of citizens in democratization. She said that the transformation of CSOs once they tasted power is something to be expected. She said that the question that must be addressed is whether democratization has allowed citizens to organize more and be more active given the cooptation and corruption of an increasing number of CSOs.

With regard to political families, Prof. Miranda asked if Filipinos are capable of transcending their loyalties to their families for greater national interest.

Dr. Filomeno Aguilar suggested that Dr. Rivera also take a look at the relationship of political families across provinces. He said there may be kinship ties and other kinds of relationships among them.

Dr. Aguilar noted that Prof. Homes' data indicated that 68 percent of Filipinos were satisfied with the quality of local governance, while Prof. Rivera's data showed that 92 percent of provinces have political families. Linking the figures, he inquired whether they suggest that people are satisfied with these ruling political families.

Since political families are part of the country's political landscape, Prof. Melissa Lao asked how political representation, interest articulation and aggregation, and political organization should be framed. She also asked if there are there any recommendations on the party list system.

On the issue of public financing for political parties, Dr. Rivera replied that there is a pending bill in Congress that proposes precisely this. The problem is how to justify public financing and taxation when political parties have problems of accountability and monitoring. He mentioned that in industrialized countries, public financing is purely a voluntary act—a citizen is asked whether he/she is willing to donate a percentage of tax money.

On how to address the trend of CSOs collaborating with established political groups, Dr. Rivera suggested that alternative parties—those that are strongly rooted in advancing legitimate social concerns—strengthen and build up their organizations first. He believes that a weak organization that collaborates with a much stronger one has a tendency to be compromised and lose its institutional competence. He stressed that the challenge is to have an alternative mode of party building and party formation.

Dr. Rivera agreed that getting political families to transcend their narrow loyalties is indeed a problem. He said that Dr. Aguilar's suggestion of looking at possible kinship ties across provinces is a sound one. He said that if political families have interests and relationships beyond their own province, these can be the basis for broadening narrow loyalties and building a constituency that is regional in nature. Dr. Rivera remarked that one institutional mechanism for this—which was suggested by Marcos years ago—is the election of Senators at the regional level. This will address problems of accountability and at the same time, force political families to create linkages and more common platforms.

Prof. Holmes clarified that his paper does not portray CSOs as monolithic and cohesive and recognizes that there are fissures among them that are historical and strategic. He stressed that while CSOs have different interests and advocacies, the one thing that they must bring to the table when they engage the state is moral capital. CSOs may engage the state, but they must also remain accountable to their base. In the last elections, for instance, the Consortium on Electoral Reforms (CER) and Institute for Political and Electoral (IPER) worked with COMELEC because they wanted to monitor the automated elections; however, groups criticized them for cooperating because they were 'legitimizing' something that was bound to fail. Another example was the CODE-NGO peace bonds which some people continue to question even though CODE-NGO had sufficiently explained its transactions years before. The challenge is for CSOs to engage government while maintaining their accountability and moral capital.

Prof. Holmes agreed with the observation that citizens ought to be given emphasis. He said that leaders must be connected to their members because this is one way that these leaders can transcend their family or community loyalties. In the case of CARPer, for instance, a broad coalition was formed because the advocates brought in communities/barangays, CSOs and local government units that supported the cause.

Prof. Holmes agreed that CSOs need to promote organizing and popular education so that their constituents do not lose track of the big picture. He said that some CSOs focus on achieving project objectives and neglect to scale up and see how these fit their larger agenda/mission.

Prof. Miranda noted that practically all correlation analyses done on democratization are now being reviewed, in some cases actually being questioned by statistically competent scholars. For instance, the truism that democratic countries do not war against each other – the "democratic peace" thesis -- is not supported by data across the board, i.e. for all kinds of democracies. It is only true for consolidated democracies but not for non-consolidated democracies that have strong nationalistic elements.

Prof. Miranda agreed that there are limitations to using the province as the political unit of analysis and suggested looking into ethnicity instead. He noted that ethnic vote does not only pertain to votes of provincial residents. For example, Pampangueños or Ilocanos living elsewhere choose their political leaders on the basis of their ethnicity.

Prof. Miranda mentioned that studies show that political socialization is done by the time children reach the age of 10. In this regard, he said that the critical agency is neither the school nor the church, but the family. Thus, he suggested educating mothers on political values.

Prof. Holmes thanked all the participants for attending and providing important inputs and comments. He said that their papers are works in progress and expressed hope that their final outputs will address the concerns that had been raised as well as provide recent evidences on what really deters or facilitates democratization.