

Tribute

Laura Samson: A Tribute to a Publisher, Editor, and Mentor Par Excellence

September 1, 1953–September 10, 2020

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Retirement party for Laura in September 2018, with Josephine C. Dionisio, UP Department of Sociology Chair, Eduardo C. Tadem, UP CIDS Program on Alternative Development Convenor, Teresa Tadem, UP CIDS Executive Director, and Antoinette Raquiza, UP CIDS Political Economy Program Convenor

Photo by: Kelly Galamgam

For this 2020 volume of the *Philippine Journal of Public Policy: Interdisciplinary Development Perspectives* (PJPP), we lined up tributes for Aileen Baviera (see Baviera tributes, pp. 165 and 173), who passed away on March 21, 2020. Aileen was a UP colleague and friend of mine, whom I have known since our undergraduate days as B.S. Foreign

Service students in the University of the Philippines (UP) during the mid-1970s. Aileen was also a fellow of the UP CIDS at various stages of her academic life. This was unexpectedly followed by another tribute for Maureen “Mo” Pagaduan, who passed away on August 11, 2020 (see Pagaduan tribute, p. 191). Mo was co-founder of the UP CIDS Program on Alternative Development, together with Eduardo Tadem.

As we were in the process of putting a “closure” to our 2020 PJPP volume, I asked Laura Samson, our PJPP editorial consultant, to expedite the copyediting of Mo’s tribute. Little did I anticipate, and with immense shock, that there would be a third tribute, this time for Laura herself. Laura passed away last September 10, 2020 due to a series of health complications.

Like Aileen and Mo, my friendship with Laura started more than 35 years ago. All three academics were part of my network of friends who actively participated in the protest movement during the Martial Law period (1972–1986), and continued to critically engage in different forms of activism thereafter.

With Laura, the friendship began when I joined the UP Third World Studies Program (UP TWSP) in 1982. The TWSP, which became the Third World Studies Center (TWSC),¹ was regarded as a watering hole of progressive academics and Left activists during the dictatorship. The TWSP was established by Francisco “Dodong” Nemenzo on February 5, 1977, when he was Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, popularly known as “A.S.” During that time, TWSP’s founding director was Randolph “Randy” David, a faculty of the UP Department of Sociology.

Coming back from their graduate studies at the University of Manchester, Randy and his wife, Karina, who was also teaching at the Department of Sociology, formed the Binuklutan Collective. This consisted of young academics among their former students who engaged in critical discussions of progressive perspectives. These included dependency theories of development, the Frankfurt School of Sociology and Edward De Bono’s ideas on thinking. Since some members of this group gravitated around the TWSC, the Center’s staff inevitably met and interacted with Laura in various TWSC forums, lecture series, protest actions, and social events.

While at the TWSC in the 1980s, I knew of Laura's reputation among students as an interesting and very engaging teacher. With an undergraduate degree in Mass Communications, her courses and research projects revolved around the areas of "sociological theory, popular culture, mass media and cultural studies" (UP TWSC 2017). Aware of her reputation as a competent editor, I was not surprised that in the 1990s, Dean Consuelo Paz of the College of Social Sciences and Philosophy (CSSP) appointed her Coordinator of the College's Research Laboratory and Publications Office (RLPO). She assumed the editorship of CSSP's in-house journal, the *Philippine Social Sciences Review* (PSSR). I interacted more closely with Laura when she was preparing the publication of the PSSR conference proceedings on "Alternative Rural Development Strategies: Findings from the Field." The articles focused on agrarian issues in Central Luzon based on a joint project of Dalubhasaan ng Agham Panlipunan at Pilosopiya (DAPP or College of Social Sciences and Philosophy) and the Centre for Asian Studies, University of Amsterdam (DAPP-CASA project) of which I was a member. The articles covered several issues, including land conversion and cooperative experiments such as that of Bernabe "Commander Dante" Buscyano of Tarlac, which I studied. In her foreword to the volume, Maria Cynthia "Cynch" Bautista, then DAPP-CASA Project Coordinator, acknowledged Laura's role in nurturing the issue from its conception to its publication (Bautista 1992, xix).

This PSSR issue must also have been special for Laura. Being Cynch's close friend, she joined our DAPP-CASA activities. Those of us in the project considered her a "de facto" member of the team. Laura was keen to publish subsequent research results of the project. Her first book publication as editor focused on the Project's field research on the disaster in the wake of the June 1991 Mt. Pinatubo eruption, an unplanned study impelled by the effects of the eruption on three field sites of the DAPP-CASA Project team, including my own site. The Team decided to iteratively shift its focus from agrarian reform to the ongoing disaster, producing articles for the book Cynch edited and Laura published. *In the Shadow of the Lingering Mt. Pinatubo Disaster* won the National Academy of Science and Technology's Outstanding Publication award in 1994. Without Laura's obsession to let the book see print, Cynch acknowledged that the book would not have been published in a timely manner.

After Laura's stint as head of the CSSP RLPO, she was appointed as UP Press Director. As Cynch narrated, an after-office informal conversation over coffee in 1994 among the late Maria Luisa Doronila, Director of the UP CIDS Education Research Program, the late Cayetano Paderanga Jr., Convenor of the UP CIDS Emerging World Environment Program, and Cynch, who was the Executive Director of the UP CIDS at that time, marveled at the number of books produced in celebration of the bicentennial of the French Revolution. Since the Philippines was about to celebrate the Centennial of the Philippine Republic, the three academics excitedly discussed the possibility of producing 100 books from 1898 to 1998. For that to happen, however, they must find a UP Press Director who would embrace the idea and translate it into reality.

When the three discussed the 100-book project with then UP President Emil Javier, they already had Laura's name in mind. Aware of Laura's dream to run the UP Press since their days as young sociology instructors in the 1970s, Cynch recommended Laura as the only person gifted with the necessary "madness" to undertake a very ambitious project, a perfectionist's eye for detail, and a reputation for competent editing. President Javier called Laura, who accepted the post without any hesitation and assured him that there will be 100 books in 1998.

An "obsession" to publish characterized her stint as UP Press Director from 1995 to 2001. The TWSC blog post that introduces Laura as the Center's new Deputy Director in 2017 perfectly captured this:

She is best known for her contribution to Philippine academic publishing. Under her watch the University of the Philippines Press saw through the completion of what was then considered as the University's biggest and most ambitious publishing venture. The "100 Taon, 100 Akda" Project, which was meant as the University's contribution to the commemoration of the Centennial of the Philippine Revolution in 1898 to 1998. (UP TWSC 2017)

UP CIDS certainly benefitted from Laura's tenacity to publish books. Cynch and Laura collaborated closely in the production of the manuscripts and their publication with then UP CIDS Publication

Coordinator Maria Corazon “Maricor” Baytion Dayrit, who eventually became Director of the Ateneo de Manila Press.

Such collaboration bore fruit in a series of books with a variety of topics falling under the themes of the wide-ranging UP CIDS programs, which include the following:

1. Mindanao Studies Program (*Socio-economic Dimensions of Moro Secessionism; A Philippine Peace Compendium; Jesuit Missionary Letters* (Volumes 1 to 4) and *Beyond the Cult of Dissidence in Southern Philippines*; and *Wartorn Zones in the Global Village*);
2. International Relations and the Emerging World Environment, or the UP CIDS' Globalization Program (*Toward a Diplomatic History of the Philippines; The Philippines and the European Community; European Union Development Assistance to the Year 2000 and Beyond; ASEAN Perspectives on Human Rights and Democracy in International Relations; Philippines in the Emerging World Environment and Globalization at a Glance* (1996) and other works on food security);
3. Disaster Management Program (*Pinatubo and the Politics of Lahar*);
4. Psychosocial Program (*Physicians and Torture*; and *Torture Survivors and Caregivers*); and
5. Biodiversity Conservation Program (*The Philippine Mangrove Ecosystems; Diversity of Spores in the Philippines Ferns; Philippine Coastal Marine Habitats at Risk*; and, *Urban Ferns and Fern Allies*).

The UP Department of Political Science's *Philippine Politics and Governance* Book

My first relationship with Laura as an editor was when I became Chair of the UP Department of Political Science in 2000. The Department was a recipient of a Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Center for Excellence (CoE) Award. Part of the award was a book project on Philippine politics and governance. What immediately entered my mind was I needed someone to see through the publication of the book, and there was no other person I could think of but Laura. In hindsight, it was also by luck that the project came at a time when Laura was already ending her term as UP Press Director in 2001, and she agreed to do this project.

In the “Foreword” of the book (Morada and Tadem 2006, ix), I wrote

The Department would like to thank the following for their invaluable assistance in making this textbook possible: Laura Samson and her editorial team for taking on the arduous task of transforming the manuscripts into its final form...



Laura with her daughter, Lara

Photo by: Hannah Glimpse Nario-Lopez

Indeed it was an “arduous task” as the Department came out with two book volumes in 2006: *Philippine Politics and Governance: An Introduction* and *Philippine Politics and Governance: Challenges to Democratization and Development* which were published by the UP Department of Political Science in collaboration with the Commission on Higher Education. Another demanding challenge Laura and her editorial team faced was having to deal with the 25 faculty members of our Department, a number of whom like myself, wrote more than one chapter. I can imagine the different writing styles one has to navigate through in copyediting. Laura would also always work with a team of at least two editors as she believed that editing work should undergo three layers. There was also the “waiting game,” as book

editors generally experience, for the book chapter authors to address the questions and necessary revisions posed by the copyeditors. I can envisage this as putting to a test Laura and her editorial teams' patience to say the least.

Even in the midst of all her editorial commitments and various academic work, Laura remained a devoted mother to her only daughter. In the two books she edited for the Department of Political Science, the girl featured on the cover was her daughter, Lara. Unfortunately, Laura was already in the hospital, and I was not able to share with her the “unprecedented” mileage these two book volumes received when CHED uploaded these two publications last August 2020 on its website. This was in the context of making these copies available to college students in light of the switch to online learning. The huge numbers of people downloading and attempting to download these two books caused the CHED portal to collapse.

Editorial Consultant of the UP TWSC's *Kasarinlan*: *Philippine Journal of Third World Studies*

I would reach out again to Laura when I became the UP TWSC Director from 2004 to 2010. As TWSC Director, I also assumed the editorship of the Center's *Kasarinlan: Philippine Journal of Third World Studies*. Initially, the TWSC was relying mainly on its research staff for the journal. A friend of mine, however, commented that he liked the articles in *Kasarinlan*, but it was unfortunate that the journal had a lot of grammatical and typographical errors. He suggested to get a professional copyeditor. Realizing that that the journal would indeed immensely benefit if it had a “professional eye,” I immediately thought of Laura for this job. The TWSC research staff agreed to this idea. Fortunately, TWSC had funds to pay an editorial consultant and editorial team.

With Laura on board, I felt confident that we would be able to produce not only a “substantively” but also a “technically” quality journal, and we did. The experience of the TWSC research staff with Laura is perfectly captured in the UP TWSC blog post on September 10, to express their condolences with the family of Prof. Laura L. Samson:

She was also highly instrumental in elevating the standard and the quality of work that went into the publication of TWSC's in-house journal, the *Kasarinlan: Philippine Journal of Third World Studies*. In 2004 she became the journal's editorial consultant/supervisor, a post she held until her appointment as deputy director. Professor Samson, "Ma'am Lau" to the staff, was as caring to her work colleagues as she was deeply dedicated in turning in scholarly works that were not only well-argued, but must also be well-written (she made a virtue of almost always knowing the precise word or punctuation to use). Disagreements between *Kasarinlan's* editorial staff and Professor Samson regarding the journal's content were not uncommon. But it was precisely this constant, but always mutually respectful back-and-forth that continues to drive the staff to be their own worst critics in their research and publications endeavors. It was mentorship at its best. She will be deeply missed. (UP TWSC 2020)

Marxism in the Philippines: Continuing Engagements

Laura and I ventured in another kind of publication relationship when I asked her to be co-editor of *Marxism in the Philippines: Continuing Engagements*, a TWSC book project which was published by Anvil in 2010. This book was an output of a brainstorming session I held during my initial month as TWSC Director. I thought it was best to consult with the former TWSC Director, i.e., Randy, and his Deputy Directors, i.e., Cynch and Patricio "Jojo" Abinales whom I had worked with when I was a research assistant at the Center in the 1980s. As TWSC fellows, Eduardo Tadem and Laura joined us in this brainstorming, together with the TWSC Deputy Director and research staff. There was a consensus that the TWSC should pursue two projects. One was a sequel to the two *Marxism in the Philippines* lecture series which were turned into a two-volume publication. The other was to pursue an oral history of the Marcos technocrats. The former took off, but not the latter.

Marxism in the Philippines: Continuing Engagements was thus patterned after the first *Marxism* lecture series entitled Karl Marx Centennial Lecture Series in 1983, which contributed to the first volume of *Marxism in the Philippines* in 1984, and the second *Marxism*

in the Philippines lecture series in 1988, which produced the second volume. These two volumes were published by the UP TWSC and it

aptly captured prominent issues and concerns confronted by the Left at the crossroads during the last years of the Marcos dictatorship and in the early years of transition to ‘cacique democracy’ under President Corazon “Cory” Aquino. (Tadem and Samson 2010, ix)

These two book volumes were also compressed by TWSC in 2010 as *Revisiting Marxism in the Philippines: Selected Essays*, edited by Patricio N. Abinales and published by Anvil.

The challenge now was to produce the third volume. To attain this, the TWSC launched a Marxism in the Philippines lecture series, which TWSC began in 2005. This produced the third *Marxism in the Philippines* volume which would come 22 years later after the second Marxism volume. The third volume recognized that

The ideas of Marx continue to find resonance in the search of alternative praxis to address current issues and concerns in Philippine society, progressive academics and public intellectuals continue to draw inspiration from Marx. (Tadem and Samson 2010, ix)

The chapters in the book included the following: (1) Marxism and ideological strategies; (2) Marxism, nationalism, globalization and the Left; (3) Marxism and the peasantry; (4) Marxism and the Philippine women’s movement; (5) Marxism and civil society; (6) Marxism and the “Chinese question”; and, (7) Marxism and Philippine theology.

I originally embarked on this book project on my own with the support of the TWSC research staff. I solicited from prospective writers, some of whom presented in the TWSC Marxism lecture series. But when it came to sifting through the submitted papers to determine what should be included or not, I decided to ask Laura to help me out as I needed another critical eye for this endeavor. With her as co-editor, I was confident that we would be able to produce a quality work as with the two previous *Marxism in the Philippines* volumes.

Oral History of the Philippine Technocracy (1965–1986)

The *Marxism in the Philippines* book project with Laura was followed in 2007 by another project which I also asked Laura for assistance. This was the research project on “Economic Policymaking and the Philippine Development Experience, 1960–1985: An Oral History Project,” where I was invited to be one of the team members. This research project, which was funded by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, (JSPS) was from April 2007 to March 2010. It was co-coordinated by Professor Yutaka Katayama of Kobe University and the late Dr. Cayetano Paderanga, Jr. of the UP School of Economics. Its objective was to interview the technocrats who worked for the Marcos Administration from 1965 to 1986.

Together with the *Marxism in the Philippines* lecture series and book project, I early on attempted to embark on this technocracy project which, as I previously mentioned, was suggested by our TWSC brainstorming session with Randy et al. Unfortunately, when I attempted to get interviews with key Marcos technocrats in 2005, e.g., Cesar E. A. Virata and Gerardo Sicat, turned down my request. We only held one interview with Marcos’ Minister of Energy, Geronimo V. Velasco, who was Randy’s friend. Laura joined us in that interview together with Randy, Cynch, Ed, and other the TWSC program staff. But under this JSPS project, of which I serendipitously got involved with, we were able to interview Virata and other key Marcos technocrats.

For the 2007 JSPS project, I needed Laura and her editorial team to copyedit all the raw interviews we held with key Marcos technocrats, among whom were the following: Cesar E.A. Virata, Placido L. Mapa, Armand V. Fabella, Vicente T. Paterno, and Manuel L. Alba as well as interviews conducted with significant personalities who could give us insights to the working of the technocrats under the Marcos Administration. These included the following: Francisco Tatad, Onofre D. Corpuz, Amando Dononila, Frankie Llaguno, Jose V. Almonte, Horacio “Boy” Morales, and Conrado Benitez. The interviews also included former technocrats who worked under the Diosdado Macapagal Administration (1961-1965), i.e., Sixto K. Roxas and Hilarion Henares.

For this project, Laura and her editorial team edited a total of 30 interviews. This is certainly as challenging or even more challenging than editing our Department's two volumes of *Philippine Politics and Governance*. The edited interviews enabled me to embark on several publications on the Marcos technocrats.

Mentoring as Laura's Raison d'etre

It would be seven years later, when I was appointed as UP CIDS Executive Director in 2017 that I would work with Laura again. As UP CIDS Executive Director, I assumed the editorship of the UP CIDS *Public Policy* journal. Together with the UP CIDS publications team, we decided to “reformat” the journal and change the name to *Philippine Journal of Public Policy: Interdisciplinary Development Perspectives* (PJPP), reconstituting the editorial board as well as introducing an editorial advisory board. I asked Laura to be the PJPP editorial consultant as I wanted her to also improve the journal just like what she did with the TWSC's *Kasarinlan*.

But beyond being an editorial consultant, I also wanted her to give the kind of mentoring which the TWSC staff received from her. Unfortunately, this was abruptly cut after the third volume of the PJPP with Laura's passing away. I, however, comforted myself with the thought that the publication values and principles she has imparted to the TWSC research staff and other publication personnel she has worked with would also be shared with others who would also be working with them. I think I am not wrong on this. When I started as CIDS Executive Director in August 2017, one of the first things I did was to contact Joel Ariate, TWSC University Researcher and managing editor of *Kasarinlan*. I asked Joel if he and the other members of the TWSC publication team could give a training seminar on journal publications to the UP CIDS publications staff, and they did. The feedback I got from the CIDS publications staff who attended was very positive.

During my last conversation with Laura, I called her up in late July to “gently” remind her of her deadline for the copyediting of articles, book reviews among others for the PJPP. To assuage me, she said she would prioritize these for July as she planned to devote her whole month of August to developing her “course pack” for this

semester and to attend the webinars on online learning which UP has been providing its faculty. I actually was so surprised to learn that, despite being a retired UP Professor, she decided to continue as a professorial lecturer despite this new mode of learning. This was given that UP faculty, in general, like myself were “stressing out” on this. As a colleague remarked, “Online learning is certainly a ‘new animal’ that still has to be learned.” I was even more surprised to find out that she was teaching an undergraduate sociology class. I actually told her, “Are you sure you want to subject yourself to this kind of stress?”

When she just laughed, it dawned on me something I have always felt about Laura. That is, beyond the teaching and the publishing is the desire and satisfaction of her mentoring students as well as young researchers in the University. This was her lifelong passion and mission. It was thus highly insensitive of me to tell her teasingly when I got to talk to her on the phone on her birthday on September 1, while she was still the hospital, that what is most important at the moment is to get well soon. I told her to forget the course pack and not to teach this semester. It was a one-way conversation as Laura could not yet speak. If she could, I can imagine her telling me that the thought that she will not be able to teach and mentor will be more painful than whatever physical pain she was experiencing at the moment.

Rest in peace, dear Laura. You are so deeply and terribly missed.

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Note

1. TWSP officially became the Third World Studies Center in 1999. But when the author joined the TWSP in 1982, people would refer to it as the Third World Studies Center or TWSC. Thus, for purposes of this tribute, TWSC will be used instead of TWSP.

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