

## **The Real Issue in the Sarah Raymundo Case: Academics versus Yahoos**

By Walden Bello\*

Should President Emerlinda Roman fail to reverse the decision of Chancellor Sergio Cao to refuse tenure to Ms. Sarah Raymundo of the Sociology Department, this will be the final act of an academic tragedy.

Never has a tenure decision-making process been as flawed as this one. Allow me to cite the crucial points in this sorry affair:

- The majority of the department, by a margin of 7-3, votes to give tenure to Ms. Raymundo.
- The minority subverts this decision by manipulating Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Lorna Paredes into sending the decision back to the majority to justify—a move that was unprecedented. Confusion ensues.
- The College Executive Board (CEB) of the College of Sciences and Philosophy upholds the majority decision to grant tenure by 7-1, with three abstentions.
- The Chancellor disregards this decision of the college's highest governing body and decides against tenure.

But the blatant irregularity of the process should not obscure the key issue in the Raymundo case. Beyond all the procedural controversies that surrounded the affair was the fundamental substantive question: did Ms. Sarah Raymundo deserve tenure on the basis of her academic record? It was the position of the minority on this issue that was, in effect, legitimized by Chancellor Cao's decision to refuse tenure.

The minority in the tenured faculty never formally based its opposition to Ms. Raymundo on academic grounds. How could they since Ms. Raymundo had an excellent publications record and superb scores on teaching evaluations, indeed probably the best in the department? Instead, the minority focused on an issue that was marginal if not irrelevant to the tenure process: that Ms. Raymundo allegedly lied about her association with a press conference on two students that had been abducted by the military. In any context, this would be a minor disciplinary matter that would be handled as such. Ms. Raymundo's guilt or innocence on this matter should have been ascertained in disciplinary proceedings separate from the tenure process. Instead, the minority elevated this alleged infraction, for which Ms. Raymundo's culpability had not been settled, into their key and only consideration in their recommendation for denial of tenure, arguing that Ms. Raymundo did not deserve it for "ethical" reasons. This might be difficult for people outside the department to believe, but this alleged infraction was the only basis of the minority's recommendation to deny tenure! Could Chancellor Cao really be serious in dignifying this position?

Why did the minority act the way it did? Let us no longer tiptoe around what was really involved in the Raymundo case, which made the stakes so high. In disregarding Ms. Raymundo's academic achievements and blocking her tenure for an unproven allegation, the minority was exhibiting a behavior that had long frustrated their other tenured colleagues and the junior faculty. They did not care about academic excellence. Most of them had poor teaching evaluations from students and their publications records were practically non-existent. The last major sociology texts they read, according to some students, probably dated two decades back. Two were in fields that were only marginally related to the discipline of sociology. Only two of them were trusted enough to handle a graduate class by their colleagues. They were not concerned with intellectual exchange, which is the lifeblood of any academic department, and they had reduced departmental life into bureaucratic humdrum. For them, being a member in good standing in the sociology department meant conforming to rules, not intellectual achievement.

Most members of the minority were, in effect, non-performing assets or, to use a kinder term lifted from Jonathan Swift, yahoos. Conscious of the power conferred by tenure, most of them terrorized junior faculty with their demand for conforming to rules, being the cause of a series of departures of bright and motivated young faculty. Not surprisingly, Ms. Raymundo, with her intellectual achievements, was seen as a threat by this anti-academic faction that championed mediocrity--one whose addition to the tenured faculty would have tipped the balance in favor of the pro-academic grouping.

The pro-academic grouping within the senior faculty, in contrast, saw Ms. Raymundo as an indispensable asset to the department, as one who could contribute to the revival of intellectual exchange and innovation in the department. This grouping, which was composed of Profs. Laura Samson, Filomin Gutierrez, Gerry Lanuza, Josephine Dionisio, and myself, saw the battle over Ms. Raymundo's tenure as having implications beyond her. We saw ourselves as fighting not only for the future of a brilliant young colleague but for the future of the department itself.

The majority's will was thwarted by an irregular decisionmaking process that was capped by Chancellor Cao's copout. But this painful story would not be complete without calling attention to the role of some members of the tenured faculty who had endorsed the original majority decision but abstained in succeeding decisions. Academics well known for their contributions to Philippine sociology, they proved to be ethically supine, unable to display the courage to stand up for their convictions. Unwilling to antagonize the minority, they retreated from endorsing Ms. Raymundo and tried to project themselves as being "above the fray." They threw Ms. Raymundo to the dogs, and they will forever have that on their conscience.

The Sarah Raymundo case is reaching its final stages. Will President Roman reverse a terrible miscarriage of justice and reassert UP's commitment to academic excellence? Or will she, like Chancellor Cao, render the final act in yielding the sociology department to the reign of the yahoos?

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