

# Randolf “Randy” S. David - Autobiography

Friday 13 November 2020, by [DAVID Randy](#) (Date first published: 13 November 2020).

Public Sociologist, University of the Philippines Professor Emeritus of Sociology, Author, Public Affairs Television Host, Newspaper Columnist, and Political Activist.

Age: 73. Born on 8 January 1946 to Pedro David, a lawyer, and Bienvenida Siongco, a homemaker, in Pampanga Province, Central Luzon, The Philippines. The eldest of 13 children, he grew up in Betis, an old village of artisans and woodcraft makers.

Married to Karina Constantino-David, retired University of the Philippines professor of community development and former Chairman of the Civil Service Commission. With four children: Carlos, a professor of geology at UP Diliman; Kara, a broadcast journalist and assistant professor of journalism also at UP Diliman; Nadya, a Los Angeles-based visual artist, and Jika, a Kuala Lumpur-based Unilever executive. And four grandchildren: Julia, Jacinta, Xavier, and Alonso.

Professor David finished his basic education in Betis and Guagua. At the age of 15, he entered the University of the Philippines in Quezon City to study sociology. Upon his graduation with a bachelor's degree in sociology, he was immediately hired as an instructor in the same university. He pursued graduate studies in the same discipline on a Rockefeller Foundation scholarship at the University of Manchester, England. Returning to the Philippines to do field research for his doctoral dissertation, he was compelled to cut short his studies when the country fell under martial law in 1972. He then returned to full-time teaching, and promptly became involved in the anti-dictatorship movement.

At the height of the Marcos dictatorship, he and some fellow professors established the Third World Studies Center to serve as an incubator of alternative ideas on the development problems of postcolonial societies. He became the founding director of the Center and the editor of its journal, *Kasarinlan* (Autonomy). Under his leadership, the Center became a hub of activist scholars who were emerging from underground political work in order to complete their academic studies, or were being released from Marcos' prisons.

The Third World Studies Center became an institutional partner of the Tokyo-based United Nations University in the early 1980s, coordinating the research of more than 2 dozen progressive scholars from the ASEAN countries. Three basic themes defined the work of the UNU Southeast Asian Perspectives network that he headed: Transnationalization, the Role of the State, and Popular Movements.

The main preoccupation of the Third World Studies Center during the final years of the Marcos dictatorship, was the preparation of a comprehensive national plan for the Philippines in anticipation of the downfall of the Marcos regime. The concept was to provide a rigorous alternative not only to authoritarian developmentalist model of the Marcos government, but also to the largely pre-modern political system that had haunted the country since it became independent in 1946.

The opportunity to make a difference came in 1986, when the EDSA People Power Uprising toppled the Marcos regime and paved the way for the rise of Corazon Aquino to the presidency. The bloodless transition, which was hailed around the world as a model in the peaceful restoration of

democracy, was fraught with difficulties. People Power had to be mobilized in order to prevent the pre-martial law political order from coming back. The time for change had come but the constituency for genuine reforms was not yet there. It needed to be created through political organizing on one hand, and popular education through the newly-liberated mass media, on the other.

Anticipating the collapse of the Marcos dictatorship, Filipinos in the early 1980s began forming themselves into people's organizations. David became one of the principal organizers of the social democratic group called "BISIG," a union of Filipino socialists that had come from different traditions. He became its chairman with the advent of the Aquino government. Bisig spearheaded the formation of the electoral coalition, Akbayan, which was aimed at putting young and bright activists in the Philippine legislature. Instead of embarking on a career in electoral politics, however, he himself chose to remain in the University, but with an eye to expanding his reach through the mass media.

In November 1986, a few months after the EDSA Revolution, Professor David found himself drafted in a new role — that of a public affairs television host who could discuss public issues with ordinary people in the Filipino language that they could understand and in which they could confidently express themselves. What was to be a 13-week engagement stretched cumulatively to more than 13 years. This intense period launched Professor David's second career as a public sociologist and media figure. Going by the familiar name "Randy David," he brought the nation's problems in the living rooms of ordinary Filipino households, tackling topics such as the American bases, the politics of Official Development Assistance, Agrarian Reform, the role of the military in a democracy, overseas migration of Filipino workers, the foreign debt, and many others. Officials of the government were invited to answer questions by ordinary citizens and to explain the details of government policies. The TV program became the regular sounding board of people's organizations and the government itself.

The weekly program was titled "Public Forum," later renamed "Public Life with Randy David" when it transferred to another channel. It ran for about 13 years, during which time, the Cultural Center of the Philippines named "Public Forum" every year as one of the country's 10 best television programs. Hosted by Randy David, it was directed by the award-winning film director Marilou Diaz-Abaya during its entire run.

Professor David remained in academe during this entire period, bridging the gap between the university and the public, and channeling social theories and findings from academic research into popular media where they found a new audience thirsty for knowledge. The country's national language, Filipino, became a big beneficiary of this encounter between academe and the mass media. It promoted the "intellectualization" of the language and its growing use as a medium for serious discourse.

But English remained the language of the dominant educated classes and the intelligentsia. Not wanting to alienate this sector, Professor David accepted the invitation of the country's leading newspaper, the Philippine Daily Inquirer, to write a regular opinion column starting in 1995. Titled "Public Lives," David's column has come out every week without fail for the last 24 years. Each of these columns is a pithy essay on a current topic. Using the sociological perspective, David typically steps back from the polemics of the day in order to gain a broader picture, and situate the issue at hand in its proper historical and societal context.

His working hypothesis has been that most of the crises that confront the nation could be better understood if they were seen in the context of Philippine society's wrenching transition to modernity. Modern society to him is synonymous to globalized society, a social system that is

functionally differentiated into various autonomous spheres. He examines the realities of globalization, or the emergence of world society, in conjunction with the rise of the new technologies, treating these as processes that have disrupted the routines of everyday life almost everywhere.

Teachers at various levels of the educational system regard David's columns, consistently written in clear and accessible language, as useful starting points for classroom discussions. Three of his books, namely, "Public Lives: Essays on Self and Social Solidarity" published in late 1990s by Anvil, "Nation, Self, and Citizenship" (UP and Anvil, 2002), and "Introduction to Philippine Society, Culture, and Politics" (UP Press, 2017), are coherent compilations of these columns. They are organized along thematic lines. Many schools use them as textbook or basic reference material in senior high school and in General Education courses at the university level. Recognizing their relevance and the quality of their expression, the National Book Circle has awarded two of these books, "Reflections on Sociology and Philippine Society," and "Nation, Self, and Citizenship," as the best books in the social science category for the years they were published.

Sought for his views on the national and global situation, Professor David continues to be invited to speak before different audiences in the Philippines and abroad. He was a Visiting Researcher at the Ryukoku University in Kyoto in 1991, and a Visiting Lecturer at the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico in 1996. Retiring as Full Professor at the University of the Philippines in January 2011, he was promptly named Professor Emeritus of Sociology. In this capacity, he has continued to teach special courses in social theory at the Department of Sociology, to give occasional lectures, and participate in thesis panels as critic or member.

Recognizing his role as one of the country's leading public intellectuals, the Ateneo de Naga University conferred on him the honorary degree of Doctor of Humanities in 2007. A few years later, in 2011, the Ateneo de Manila University conferred on him the Ozanam Award in recognition of his role as an educator and as a public advocate of social justice. On the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> year of its founding in 2008, the University of the Philippines, where David studied and served as Faculty Regent and Full Professor, named him one of its Centennial Fellows, giving him the privilege of sharing his reflections on the University of the Philippines in a public lecture.

Apart from writing, teaching, and lecturing, Professor David currently performs an advisory role in a number of boards. He sits as a member of the Ateneo Loyola Schools Board, and as an adviser to the board of the ABS-CBN broadcasting company, the country's largest television network. He was past chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation, where he continues to serve as a member of the board. On the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding, the Third World Studies Center honored him for his dedication to progressive scholarship and for nurturing young scholars from all over the world. He remains an active member of the international board of editors of its journal *Kasarinlan*.

An avid birdwatcher, gardener, and motorcycling enthusiast, he occasionally writes about his travels and hobbies in his weekly newspaper column, *Public Lives*.

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