

*What's in a name and who's the person behind it?*

*Meinhard Bayani Ramos Cardenas* is my full name. Following how somebody who grew up in the United States would recite such syllables, I pronounce these as “mine-heart”, “buh-yah-knee”, “rah-moss”, and “car-deh-naz”.

The norm in the Philippines where I grew up is a person's middle name is their mother's maiden name. This is inherited from how maternal and paternal last names are hyphenated in former Spanish colonies but with the names' order reversed, with the father's last name written last (not as *Cardenas-Ramos* or *Cardenas y Ramos*). Carrying our mother's maiden name as our middle initial leads to an optional forth name which is equivalent to the typical middle name in the US; a second name like Charline in “Barbara Charline Jordan”. I go by Bayani, my second name. Unless you are the person that gave birth to me and you are upset at something that I did, I discourage you from addressing me as Meinhard.

I sign authored works as “M. Bayani Cardenas”. I sadly had to drop my middle and mother's maiden name of Ramos for brevity and to avoid confusion and complicating how to cite my work. I also ‘initialized’ my first name to ‘M.’ because I have not really used Meinhard or my nicknames derived from it since high school.

My names reflect my history and of the Philippines. I was born when my Filipino parents were living in Germany where the law required gender-specific names. It might be still the case. *Meinhard*, meaning strong, brave or hardy, hence became my given name to signify my gender at birth. *Bayani* is Tagalog for “hero” or “one who sacrifices for the nation (*bayan* means country or land)”. The last two of my names are typical Spanish surnames that Filipinos adapted during the colonial Spanish rule (1565-1898) and Christianization. The most prominent example of Spanish naming is how *Las Islas Filipinas* was named in honor of King Philip II of Spain.

The Philippines is a cultural cauldron. Tagalog shares words with Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Melayu (and thus Sanskrit) superposed by a lot of Spanish words, and now interspersed with American English, resulting in Taglish. Filipinos naturally connect with our Asian neighbors despite being the only dominantly Christian country in all of Asia, owing to the Spaniards. We also have bonds with the Spanish colonies in the Americas. The Manila-Acapulco galleon trade route ensured these. The Philippines' colonial history was capped by half a century of American colonization following the Spanish-American war, interrupted by a brief but brutal occupation by the Imperial Japanese Army during the second world war. Throughout the pre-colonial times to present, there had been connections with China. The Chinese diaspora, particularly merchants, were always present in the islands. It is also typical for Filipinos to have last names of Chinese origin and American/English first names. The modern Philippines and the modern Filipinx reflect the legacy of the different connections with our neighbors and colonial rule. Our names, my name, say it all.

Diversity is in my DNA. Genetically I am 78% Filipino & Austronesian, 13% Chinese, and 8% Southern European (mainly Spanish and Portuguese). I moved to the United States to pursue graduate education and became a full-fledged citizen when America had its first multiracial Black president who lived part of his childhood in Indonesia. Like Barack Hussein Obama's, my name says a lot.