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"The Public and the Private in Contemporary Philippine Society. A Study on Political Dynasties" by Alejo José G. Sison, Ph. D.

I. Introduction

1.) This is a paper on "Contemporary Philippine Political Culture"; more concretely, on what such culture considers as "public" and "private" as reflected in its treatment of the issue of "political dynasties".

Upon the indications of scholars in this field, we have considered three different accounts of "political culture": 1.) Pye & Verba (1965) speak of "the system of empirical beliefs, expressive symbols and values which defines the situation in which political action takes place"; 2.) Almond & Powell (1966) refer to "the pattern of individual attitudes and orientations towards politics among the members of a political system", "the subjective realm which underlies and gives meaning to political actions"; and 3.) theorists from the "Sociology of Knowledge" School as Berger & Luckmann (1966; Canieso-Doronila, 1992) understand the ordered subjective realm of politics characterized by three broad categories of orientations defining the political self, i.e., a) political attachments towards the nation and its symbols, b) specific knowledge, feelings and beliefs about political institutions and c) transient views about specific political policies, issues, programs, personalities and events.

We therefore put the focus on attitudes, orientations, views; -and on a more stable plane- on feelings, beliefs, knowledge, symbols, values and other attachments or loyalties, which, insofar as ordered, integrate a "system" or a "realm". Political culture is "subjective" inasmuch as it necessarily has to be shared by several individuals and it is constitutive of the "political self". Finally, political culture is never just a mere object of contemplation, but rather, it is inherently directed towards action (praxis) as its substrate, context or source of meaning.

What do we mean by positing a distinctively "Philippine political culture"? First of all, we should forewarn that its integrative elements are not necessarily exclusive to the Filipinos nor shared by all of them. Given the spatial (rural and urban, multiplicity of regional and ethnic groups, etc.) and the temporal (different periods of historical evolution) diversity of Philippine society, it would be sufficient to underscore some relatively important and dominant factors which provide a general explanation and interpretation of political behavior. Among these factors are the co-relative notions of "public" and "private" space. As Roces & Roces (1985, pp. 125-126) acutely observe, "Filipinos do not think of public space as being a shared community asset which must be cared for and respected by all: that concern is passed on as the task of government. (...) [in what pertains to the "private" sphere] Traditional Filipino kinship patterns develop a lax attitude about helping oneself to a family member's goodies. Reluctance to share is considered extremely stingy. (...) there will be members who will help themselves. (...) Sharing is the custom." The criterion as to which vital areas are subject to public or private domain is revealing of a country's political culture.

Wúrfel (1988) has established the following periodization of Philippine history: the pre-Spanish era, the Spanish era, the revolutionary period, the American period, the Japanese period and the post World War II period. This last period may be further subdivided into: a.) the time covered from Philippine independence from American rule (July 4, 1946) to the declaration of Martial Law by Pres. Ferdinand E. Marcos (September 21, 1972); b.) the Martial Law period to the EDSA People Power Revolution (February 22-23, 1986); c.) post-EDSA Revolution. By "Contemporary Philippine Political Culture" we refer to the scenario after the EDSA Revolution, to the mandate of Pres. Corazón C. Aquino and the incumbency of Pres. Fidel V. Ramos.

2.) Among the major issues brought to fore on the occasion of the May 8, 1995 elections for Senate, Congress and Local Government posts was that which concerned the so-called "political

dynasties". Towards the end of December, 1994, former Lt. Col. Proceso Maligalig, spokesman for the rebel soldier group RAM (Rebolusyonaryong Alyansang Makabayan) urged the government to enact a new election code which included, among its provisions, the prohibition of political dynasties (Esplanada, 1994). On January 2, 1995, Pres. Ramos appealed to the Congress to decide on the package of election reforms which contained this prohibition (PDIa). The groundwork was prepared, since the Guingona bill and the Palacol bill both seeking the ban on political dynasties in the Senate and in the House respectively, were already introduced. Yet such enabling legislations which would have lent meaning to constitutional directives were shelved (David, 1995). In the words of Speaker José de Venecia, Jr. of the ruling coalition, when asked about the passing of this bill, "It will not be easy. We have the Asistios, Gordons, Osmeñas, Shahanis, Duranos, Marcoses, and many others who will be affected by this." (Esplanada, 1994)

Perhaps the earliest mention of "political dynasties" in contemporary Philippine society be found in the 1986 Constitution, art. II "Declaration of Principles and State Policies", sec. 26: "The State shall guarantee equal access to opportunities for public service, and prohibit political dynasties as may be defined by law." The proposed omnibus election code, among its rules on candidacy, includes the following ammendment (sec. 115): "Political dynasty defined; Prohibited candidacies. The term "political dynasty" refers to a situation where persons related to each other within the third civil degree of consanguinity or affinity hold elective offices simultaneously or the same office successively in a region, legislative district, province, city, municipality. (or barangay). To prevent the establishment of a political dynasty, persons within the same civil degree of relationship shall not be allowed to run for any elective position in the same political unit in the same election. Neither can a person within the same civil degree of relationship as the incumbent succeed to the position of the latter. This prohibition includes legal or common law partners. Certificates of candidacy filed in violation hereof shall not be given due course."

By virtue of the above-given definitions, we may cite -solely on the basis of the publicity that they have received- the following de facto political dynasties:

1.) The Ramos-Shahani clan based in Pangasinan. Simultaneously holding elective offices are Pres. Fidel V. Ramos of the Philippine Republic, Senate President Pro Tempore Leticia Ramos-Shahani (sister of Fidel) and Vice-Governor Ranjit R. Shahani of Pangasinan (son of Leticia). In the May 8, 1995 polls Ranjit R. Shahani is running for congressman for the sixth district of Pangasinan, while Hernani R. Braganza (nephew of both Fidel and Leticia, cousin of Ranjit) is a candidate for the first district of the same province (PDIb; PDIc; Cornel & Fuertes, 1995; Lucas, 1995; PDIId; Fernández et al., 1995).

2.) The Joson clan of Nueva Ecija. Eduardo Joson, Sr. first became the governor of Nueva Ecija in 1959 and stayed in that post until he was relieved by the Aquino government appointed Officer-in-Charge, Noli Santos, in 1986. In the 1988 elections Eduardo Joson, Sr. regained governorship. Eduardo Nonato Joson II (son of Eduardo Sr.) was the representative of the first district of Nueva Ecija and Eduardo Joson III (son of Eduardo Sr. and brother of Eduardo Nonato II) was the vice-mayor of Cabanatuan until his death in an ambush in 1990. Eduardo Joson, Sr. died during his term and Narciso Nario assumed stewardship over the province. Nario's vice-governor was no other than Tomás Joson, the eldest son of Eduardo Joson, Sr. and brother to Eduardo Nonato II and Eduardo III. In the polls of 1992 Tomás Joson assumed governorship. With the deaths of Eduardo Sr. and Eduardo III, together with the withdrawal of Eduardo Nonato II, the only remaining brother in elective office was Mariano Cristino Joson, as mayor of Quezon, Nueva Ecija. Originally, for the May 8, 1995 votations, Tomás and Mariano Cristino were vying for re-election, whereas Eduardo Nonato II wanted to stage a come-back in the first district. After having been implicated in the murder of a rival candidate for governor, Honorato Pérez, Sr., the candidacies of Tomás for governorship and Mariano Cristino for mayoralty was replaced by those of Eduardo Nonato II and Eduardo IV, respectively. Josephine Manuel-Joson (wife of Tomás) substitutes Eduardo Nonato II in the congressional bid. Surprisingly, even Honorato Pérez, Sr. shall be replaced in a manner that violates the anti-dynasty bill: his common-law-wife, Virginia Custodio has picked up the cudgels for him (De Guzmán, 1995; Herrera, 1995; Roque, 1995).

3.) The Crisólogo-Singson clan based in Ilocos Sur. Luis Crisólogo Singson became governor of Ilocos Sur for the first time in 1967. Ever since, he has either been governor or congressman for the first district of this province. In the May 8, 1995 elections, he is once more running for governor, his brother, Jeremías, for provincial board member and his sister, MarYá Livia Singson de León, for congresswoman of the first district. His cousin, Eric DarYó Singson, is running for the

congressional seat in the second district. Grace, the wife of Eric, is seeking re-election as the mayor of Candon, Ilocos Sur. Eva Marie Singson Medina, a niece of Luis, is in the mayoralty race of Vigan, while her son, Randy, seeks to become one of the councilors of the provincial capital (Cimatu, 1995a & b).

Throughout the length and breadth of the Philippine archipelago, the following political dynasties have, at one time or another, caught the attention of the media: The Acostas of Bukidnon (Aquino, 1995); the Amantes of Agusan del Norte; the Guingonas of Misamis Oriental; the Dimaporos and the Pangandamans of Lanao; the Plazas of Agusan del Sur; the Almendras of Davao del Sur; the Antoninos of South Cotabato; the Chiongbianes of Sarangani; the Ramiros of Misamis Occidental (Arguillas, 1995); the Tulawies of Sulu; the Ecleos of Surigao del Norte; the Matalams, the Masturas and the Dutamanongs of Maguindanao (PDIe); the Fariñas, the Venturas and the Valdez of Ilocos Norte (Pascual, 1995); the Montelibanos of Negros Occidental (Benedicto et al., 1995); the Asistios of Kalookan (Flores, 1995), etc.

II. Statement of the Problem and Hypothesis.

The constitution of political dynasties in the Philippines may be attributed, in large measure, to the confusion between the realms of the "public" and the "private". More concretely, it refers to familial relations transgressing the limits of the private and dominating public space, that is, elective government office.

What distinctive features of contemporary Philippine political culture positively contribute to the formation of political dynasties?

[At this point, it may be helpful to distinguish political dynasties from the related phenomenon of nepotism. The latter is a Latin term (from "nepos", "nephew") and concept which refers to the favoritism shown a relative by bestowing upon him appointive public office regardless of his merit and competence. It was originally applied to the Popes who, driven by the need for trustworthy persons, turned to their own nephews naming them very powerful cardinals. The figure of the Cardinale-nepote was abolished and substituted by the Cardinal Secretary of State through the decree Romanum decet Pontificem (22 June 1692). This practice has nonetheless survived in secular politics the world over for similar reasons as those of the Popes' several centuries before. The main difference, therefore, between political dynasties and nepotism lies in that the former relates to elective office, whereas the latter, to appointed posts.]

III. Analysis.

In keeping with modern social-scientific practice, our analysis attempts to be both explicative and etiological of the formation of political dynasties within the Philippine context. What we shall consciously avoid, at least in the present moment, is the passing of political and much less, moral judgment over the constitution of such dynasties. Our explanation shall pivot on two main points: 1.) very strong family ties and 2.) a faulty understanding of the "political" or "public".

1. Timberman (1991) enumerates the following hallmarks of contemporary Philippine political culture: the primacy of kinship ties, the importance of reciprocity and patron-client relationships, the emphasis on smooth interpersonal relationships and pervasive poverty insofar as it affects values and behavior. With the exception of the last characteristic, all the others may be subsumed under the heading of "very strong family ties".

a.) The primacy of kinship ties. As a traditional agrarian society, the extended family is the most important social and economic unit in the Philippines. Kinship is bilateral, that is, traced through both the father's and the mother's ancestral lines. Such a network is further broadened by "fictive" (insofar as beyond the ties of blood and marriage) and "ritual" (issuing from sponsorships in weddings, baptisms and confirmations, in Spanish, "compadrazgo") kinships. This notion of "family" or "kamag-anak" is the primary source of social and financial support, the foundation of political organizations and the chief claimant to the loyalty of its members.

b.) The importance of reciprocity and patron-client relationships. Reciprocity means that favors or gifts received now should be returned in the future. There is no clear distinction between a gift or a personal favor and what one receives as a right. The patron-client relationship is a species of reciprocity between persons of unequal socioeconomic status and it is modelled after the

paterno-filial relationship. The obligations arising from the patron-client relationship are almost unilaterally determined by the patron and can thus very easily degenerate into exploitation. A most basic instance of patronage is that exercised by the landowner over his tenant farmers.

Reciprocity, and in particular, patron-client relationships, are governed by the traditional value of "utang ng loob" (literally, "inner debt" in the sense of "debt of self", or better still, a deep and practically unrepayable "debt of gratitude"). This custom is perhaps the strongest agent of vertical integration in society, outside of kinship ties. Whoever fails to honor his "utang ng loob" is considered "walang hiya" ("without shame, honor or credibility", "loss of face in public"), which is the worst opprobrium possible in Philippine society.

c.) The emphasis on smooth interpersonal relationships (sir). An almost absolute value is placed on "smooth interpersonal relationships" or "pakikisama" (literally, "getting along with the group"). A premium is given to being polite, respectful, accommodating and non-confrontational, through an ingenious use of rhetoric, no matter what the issue at stake may be. This value is perhaps the most powerful horizontal bond in society; in absolute strength, it comes after family bonds and "utang ng loob". Whoever transgresses the law of "pakikisama" makes himself equally worthy of being called "walang hiya".

d.) Pervasive poverty insofar as it affects values and behavior. Indigence has made the Filipino concentrate on immediate concerns, on short-term gains and benefits for himself, his family or group, instead of on the long-term interests of his class or nation.

2. A genetic study of the semantics of the term "political" would reveal the following idea-tree: In the first place, it refers to an essential characteristic of any human action, and only derivatively, to the task of government proper. Government, in turn, is subdivided into the executive, the legislative and the judicial functions. The executive branch should be identified more as a professional and efficient administration rather than as a bloated, impersonal and inefficient bureaucracy. All of these areas belong to the "political" or "public" realm.

a.) In the contemporary Philippine setting, unfortunately, the "political" or the "public" concern is limited to and exclusive of government. Citizens, as a rule, retreat into their "private" lives and leave governance almost entirely to the hands of politicians. The scope of the "private" or the "personal" -as we had seen from the above, the "familiar"- is correspondingly broadened. Care and maintenance for public property is virtually non-existent; if ever, public property shall be subject to use or abuse as if it were one's own, personal, familiar or private property.

b.) The legislative and the judicial functions of government merge under the control of the executive. The separation of powers has never really been operational within the Philippine context, where judges and justices eventually become legislators, and as such, ambition executive posts. What could be said of judges and justices of course also applies to the military. For practical purposes, the Philippine presidency could be likened to a monarchy which, quite facilely, transforms itself into a tyranny.

Due to its Western trappings, Philippine politics acquires relative legitimacy through democratic elections (Corpuz, 1969). But rampant election fraud and cheating notwithstanding, votes are cast on the basis of popularity (media and sports personalities) and power or force ("lakas" in the vernacular, the electoral process is seen as a contest of force or "palakasan" before the government or the people) fueled by money and wealth, rather than on knowledge, expertise and authority. In this sense, what we have in the Philippines is a "market-driven" politics.

c.) The bureaucracy becomes corrupt as soon as the monarch or tyrant realizes his need for support from among the ranks. He gets this support basically from his kin because blood or "ritual" loyalty is readily available, abundant, cheap and dependable. This practice issues in nepotism for the appointive offices and in political dynasties for the elective posts. And insofar as there exists a vicious cycle between power and wealth, corruption in government adopts the form of a plutocracy, then of a kleptocracy.

Routine bureaucratic transactions such as voting, applying for a license or a permit, entering a business contract, etc. are "personalized" and "particularized"; i.e., they are made to include personal favors and other unspecified obligations. No distinction is observed between government resources and private funds. When infrastructure projects are inaugurated, for example, citizens

feel more indebted to their representative than to the government. Particularism takes place when political decisions are based on preserving or increasing the benefits of a small group (i.e., members of one's family or ethno-linguistic group) to the exclusion of others or the nation as a whole. It undermines the very notion of equality before the law.

IV. Conclusion and Recommendations.

1. The prevalence of very strong family ties, practically over-running the sphere of the private, combined with a very limited or reduced construal of the political, identified with the realm of the public, explains the propensity of contemporary Philippine political culture for the constitution of political dynasties.

2. Together with politics, ethics too is an inescapable dimension of all genuinely human actions. We shall now raise a couple of points crucial for the deliberation of the rightness or wrongness of political dynasties. (At this point, it is quite futile to weigh the merits of "pagka-kamaganak", "utang ng loob" and "pakikisama" which, depending on the circumstances, are morally ambivalent cultural traits.)

a.) The formula used by the 1986 Philippine Constitution, Article II (Declaration of Principles and State Policies), Section 26 is a conjunction of two different members: "The State shall guarantee equal access to opportunities for public service, and prohibit political dynasties as may be defined by law." (Nolledo, 1987) By "opportunity for public service", we are to understand any government post, be it appointive or elective (although for the case of political dynasties, only elective posts are to be considered); and by "equal access" we mean fair elections. As far as "political dynasties" are concerned, there has been an attempt to define them in an amendment to the Omnibus Election Code, Section 115. Now then, does not the prohibition of political dynasties precisely go against the equal access to opportunities for public service which the Constitution is supposed to guarantee? Is not such a prohibition discriminatory against those who already have relatives, up to the third degree of consanguinity or affinity, occupying government posts? Does not the principle of "equality before the law" include equality, regardless of one's family relations?

b.) Secondly, could there not be situations in which political dynasties could be justified? (Not solely on the basis of the number of votes garnered in an electoral process, since the proposed amendment would disqualify certain individuals from even filing their candidacy.) Could not nature -since that is what consanguinity is all about- endow individuals belonging to the same family with the best qualifications (intelligence, leadership capacities, etc.), relative to other candidates, to perform government tasks? And even if those qualifications were to be acquired not by nature but by nurture, is not upbringing relatively homogeneous in a family? Consider the case of a remote and isolated area in the Philippines, lacking in basic social services such as opportunities for education. It is highly probable that the families which could afford to send their children to urban centers for their schooling produce the citizens best equipped to hold the reins of government.

3. If, due to the present circumstances of Philippine Society, political dynasties should be avoided, inasmuch as they are generally perceived to be fertile ground for graft and corruption in government, together with Doronila (1995) we should, therefore, move for:

a.) The professionalization of politics. In a large measure, the results of the May 8, 1995 elections represent a positive step towards this direction. The bulk of the losers come from the ranks of the so-called "traditional politicians" or "trapos" (the Tagalog word for "rags"), whose only credential for public office is the fact that their relatives either have held such posts in the past or are incumbents. Professionalization could, of course, take many forms, as the formation offered in the French Ecoles or in some political parties to the youth who aspire for careers in government.

b.) The industrialization and modernization of the socioeconomic system. This is a favorable measure insofar as it emancipates a large parte of the population, specifically, the tenant-farmers, from their landlords, with whom they maintain a relationship akin to bondage. To some degree, this simply means a heightened consciousness in these farmers of their civil and political liberties, as well as of their equality with the landowners before the law.

c.) The strengthening of civil society as against the expansionist movements of the state. The

common good of a nation should not be the concern of the state or government alone, but of each and every one of its citizens, either individually or in voluntarily-constituted groups. In this regard, the sprouting of several cause-oriented non-gubernamental organizations or "NGO's", which could exercise a more effective albeit sectorial tutelage of the common good, should be welcomed and further promoted.

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