



BEYOND THE CLASSICS: IDENTIFYING GAPS AND SETTING TRAJECTORY IN UNDERSTANDING POLITICAL DYNAMICS IN PHILIPPINE LOCAL POLITICS

LUISITO V. DELA CRUZ

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND THE HUMANITIES

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

SAN BEDA UNIVERSITY

ldelacruz@sanbeda.edu.ph

Epistemological frames and theoretical underpinnings are developed precisely to give coherence and cognitive rendering to a rather chaotic appearance of the world and reality to man's consciousness. These frames offer associations of nuances and concepts that in turn provide cogent systems of understanding, which contribute to man's unending search for meanings combining as it were his experience of the world and his ability to mentally grasp such experience hence, the Ancient Greek word episteme. In the social sciences, theoretical frameworks are formulated to provide grounding venues for construing the complexities and specificities of social phenomena toward a better understanding of the social world. Concomitantly, these frameworks are assessed and evaluated based on their capacity to utter notions and tell stories of the slice of reality they wish to depict.

It is in this respect that this paper offers a critical examination of the most prevalent theoretical frames and epistemic perspectives, herein referred to as classics, deployed in understanding Philippine political local dynamics. In light of Philippine contemporary economic, social, cultural, and political developments, the article identifies some gaps and bumps in these 'classics' to offer a research trajectory that scholars in the field can rightly consider. Through a synthesis of existing political paradigms applied in local politics, the paper highlighted nuances that are ignored, realities that are not yet explored, and concepts rendered with over-simplistic meanings, suggesting imperatives for modifications, deconstructions, and even reconstructions.

Keywords: *Local Politics, Philippine Political Dynamics, Patronage Politics, Philippine Political History, History of Political Ideas*

Dates:

Received: February 24, 2021

Accepted: August 23, 2021

Published(Online): Sept. 30, 2021

How to cite this article:

Dela Cruz, Luisito V., "Beyond the Classics: Identifying Gaps and Setting Trajectory in Understanding Political Dynamics in Philippine Local Politics", *Scientia* Vol 10 no. 2. (2021), p. 94-109.

Copyright:

Online: Asean Citation Index, DOAJ.

This work is licensed under the Creative Common Attribution License © 2021.

Print: Philippine Copyright © September 2021 San Beda University

Read online



Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online





Fluid and dynamic in charting its course, contextualized and subjected to its own historicities; politics is a never-ending process, full of life, vibrance, and even contested at times. Finding meanings and making sense of this dynamism and fluidity; elucidations and deciphering have been rendered. Articulating political landscapes, searching patterns, and enunciating generalizations that hope to capture the best descriptions possible, scholars are preoccupied. Such is the role of the man of letters in the field of the political; hence political theories develop that subsequently form political thought aiming, as it were, to explain concepts into something that transcends stagnation: always flowing and ever-changing.

In the exercise of rendering meanings to political events and political processes, the field that modernity instituted; so attracted to positivism, learned to manifest utterances that eventually express clusters of separate ideas, theoretical concepts from these clusters, patterns from these concepts, and metanarratives from these patterns. Theories are how they are called in science, epistemology in Philosophy, and Classics if they are reified. At the outset, this is entitled *Beyond the Classics* for it tries to discover nuances and peculiarities yet to be captured in the political dynamics of the subnational level of Philippine politics with the utmost hope of offering the trajectory that future studies can explore. Classics, as some of the existing literature, are dynamics yet to be explored brought about by their life-worlds, coupled with transforming conditions: realities that can never be ignored. After all, just like its accompanying framework i.e. modernity, theoretical classics in politics have the tendency to be universalizing, usually being guilty of leaving aspects that are just too significant to be disregarded.

It cannot be discounted that in the field of social sciences, one of the responsibilities, the most important at that, of scholars is to deploy theories and epistemic foundations of social phenomena to create a better understanding of the world. This fashioning clarifies certain practices; some of them may be at the outset viewed as rather banal and mundane, by deploying parameters, perspectives, and lenses as to how they can be properly viewed. By nature, this epistemic character of the social sciences is what makes them as applied science. Attempting to offer a theory about a particular social phenomenon means providing basis, lenses, and perspectives in understanding specific aspects of the social world. This would result to a better view of the topic being examined since theoretical grounding offers concepts that link phenomena as it appears in the reality and abstract formulations that render these phenomena their meanings.¹

The epistemic character of theory formation is important since it provides the basic ideas and concepts that will set the anchoring venue of succeeding interpretations of the society and its components. These concepts and ideas are being formulated and clarified to “form the foundation of meaningful communication, introduce a perspective on the object under discussion, provide a means of classification and generalisation, and serve as a component of theories and concomitantly of explanations and predictions.”²

However, understanding, let alone defining local political dynamics in the Philippines and perhaps even elsewhere, require more than just having overarching frameworks. Some of these frameworks, especially those that are supposed to describe practices and political gradations

¹ Thornhill, Chris and van Dijk, Gerrit. “Public Administration Theory: Justification for Conceptualisation.” *Journal of Public Administration* 45, no. 1.1 (2010): 99-97.

² *Ibid.*, 97.





can prove to be counter-productive if there are nuances and specific political exercises and contexts that are left neglected hence left unresolved. Conceptual 'hegemons', in fact, evince important aspects and areas of the politics useless that often lead to the misunderstood phenomenon. Specificities and contexts of political phenomena must always be considered if a truly authentic description of political dynamics is to be provided.

LOCAL POLITICS: FOUNDATION OF CONTEMPORARY PHILIPPINE STATE

As can be gleaned from the body of literature in the field of political science in the Philippines, clarifying conceptions and idiosyncrasies of Philippine local political dynamics is a huge step in comprehending the conduct of national politics in the country. Contemporary Philippine state, institutions, and political subtleties as can be surmised from the nation's political history are founded on the consolidation of political power at the local level characterized by the ties and 'dyadic relationships' that local power-holders created. Since as early as the Spanish colonial regime, the political influence of local leaders permeated what is supposed to be a 'centralized' and unified Philippine polity. This pattern persisted and its continuity manifested despite the change of colonial administration from Spain to the United States. The same has become the basic foundations of the creation of the 'modern', contemporary Philippine state.

Both administrative and political structures were, in most important respects, very decentralized and provincial power-holders came to enjoy a great deal of influence on overall levels of governance – from local bodies up to the executive agencies in Manila. The thorough penetration of the bureaucracy by extensive systems of patronage, moreover, further promoted local autonomy at the expense of central authority.³

³ Hutchcroft, Paul. "Colonial Masters, National Politicos, and

The above quotation discusses the factor that shaped the formation of the modern Philippine state. As can be found in practically all studies in Philippine political history, currently existing fundamental processes and systems in institutions and politics in the country had been initially laid down by the American colonial administrators in what they termed as 'political education' of the natives. This task initially started during the early part of American occupation in their initiative of further strengthening local government units as it was misconstruing the existing government structure of the Philippines as characterized by a strong central authority. This imperative for decentralization provided enough space for local leaders to find their way to national power while simultaneously maintaining their stronghold in their respective local bailiwicks. In line with these assumptions, it can be inferred that understanding national politics in the Philippines entails having a clear and coherent view of the political developments in the realm of local politics.⁴

With the foregoing presuppositions, this paper critically examines some of the frameworks and theoretical rendering prevalent in understanding local dynamics in the Philippines. These frameworks are considered to be some of the most fundamental lenses that have been deployed in succeeding analyses of specific political practices in the country. It can be claimed that from these viewpoints contemporary understanding of politics in the Philippines particularly at the local level has been anchored. Most of them provide the overarching frame of cognition in describing the type of political interplay present in the countryside. It must be said, however, that this paper does not intend to offer a particular

Provincial Lords: Central Authority and Local Autonomy in the American Philippines, 1900-1913." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 2 (2000): 278.

⁴ For more complete information on Philippine political history particularly the initial foundations of the Philippine state see Lande (1968) and Hutchcroft (2000).





alternative paradigm. Neither that this paper aims to offer a sort of ‘deconstruction’ to the existing epistemic constructs that these lenses provided since doing so requires more rigorous and intensive fieldwork. The immediate work at hand is to offer a comprehensive discussion on the metanarratives and grand themes that are proliferated in the process of knowledge generation in describing political dynamics. Concomitant to this end is the identification of some gaps and apertures that these prevalent frames obscure with the hope of offering topics and opening possible nuances that scholars in the field could properly consider.

PATRON-CLIENT FACTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Densely situated in the body of political science scholarship in the Philippines is the use of the patron-client factional framework. Needless to say, this framework has become the most dominant framework in understanding the complex process of politics in the country. Studies that utilized this framework range from examination of both local and national political parties in the Philippines to electoral politics to the creation of political machinery to the establishment of political organizations. Most of the literature developed examining different political exercises, especially in local politics, take the PCF framework as a grounding venue; its underlying concepts have become one of the most utilized in the field.

In his analysis of political parties and the general interplay of politics in the Philippines, Carl Lande emphasized the role of parochial loyalties in the Philippine political landscape. The patron-client factional framework presupposes a relationship that is founded on the principle of mutual exchange. Instead of being animated by clear and coherent political party ideology

clashes, political forces and factionalism work based on “localism, kinship, and adherence to personal leaders”.⁵ Interpersonal loyalties based on kinship and the principle of symbiotic relationship are the main factors that drive political factionalism; the very heart and core of political movements and dynamics both in the local and the national realms. The trajectory of claiming success in political exercises and maintaining hegemony thereof is therefore dependent on the rival factions of different competing families and their capacity to lure their constituencies:

Leadership in most factions tends to be retained over long periods by a family or a cluster of related families whose claim to preeminence rests upon wealth and/or the number of their kinsmen residing in the town. Their close kinsmen, regardless of their place of residence in the town or their socioeconomic status, usually support the faction with a fairly high degree of loyalty. Structurally, Philippine factions, despite the categorical character of their names, are held together as much by dyadic ties of interpersonal loyalty – a form of structure discussed at greater length below – as by loyalty to discrete groups or categories.⁶

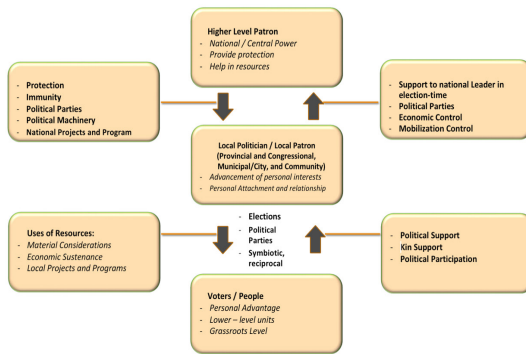
This political framework involves several types of patronage alliances among politicians in the same level of political influence (horizontal alliances) and imbued with several layers of patron-client ties (vertical alliances). Below is a graphical interpretation of this seemingly complex structure of political dynamics based on Carl Lande’s patron-client factional framework as applied in his examination of political parties and the nature of politics in the Philippines:

⁵ Lande, Carl. “Parties and Politics in the Philippines.” *Asian Survey* 8, no. 9 (1968): 727.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 727.



Figure 1. Graphical Interpretation of the Patron-Client Factionalism Framework Dynamics



Clearly shown in the diagram above are the vertical alliances that flow from the patrons in the national government. These upper-level patrons pertain to the national politicians, which hold or are wielding national political power. They are also the leading personalities in national political parties in the country. These upper-level patrons establish their 'political machinery' by consolidating their local political leaders (in the form of factionalism of competing local political families) through provisions of special favors and exchanges. Among others, these favors take the form of national projects and programs, provisions for protection and security from national government agencies, political resources of the national political party, and at times even state immunity.

As can be seen in the box following the higher-level patron are several layers of patronage that exist at the local level. This is patterned after the bureaucratic layers of the local government structure of the Philippines. Similar to the complexities found in the national-local ties, there also exist special relationships between the upper-level politician at the local level to their lower-level politician clients. In other words, political power holders in the localities take dual functions: they are clients to their upper patron on one hand while taking the role of patron to their lower-level clients on the other.

It must be emphasized and as alluded to in the preceding discussions, the relationship that exists in politics as viewed by the PCF framework is one that is founded on personal ties: alliances are based on individual interests governed by transactional relationships. Political parties are mere vehicles of political machinery rendering as it were the ideals and principles of their respective parties meaningless, if not totally irrelevant. Alliances between national to local political actors and within the different layers of political players in the local levels i.e. provincial to municipal and/or city and municipal/city to its respective barangay and sitio clients are based on the capacity of these local leaders to deliver needed votes and to consolidate support to their upper-level patrons during election-time. In return, if able to yield or maintain their political hold, these patrons would eventually reward their clients. Such is what Lande, borrowing an anthropological term, calls 'dyadic ties'.

...the stress upon particular goals fosters the formation of alliances extending across the boundaries of economic group and class. This is so far the following reason: When individual interests are advanced through the seeking of special favors, the role of the dispenser of favors becomes a very strategic one. Aware of this fact, those fortunate enough to occupy such a role learn to extract, as *quid pro quo*, equivalent rewards from those whom they favor. Mutually pleasing transactions of this sort tend to be repeated. Thus there are established fairly stable mutual aid arrangements between pairs of individuals, with each partner helping the other pursue his personal goals.⁷

The same framework has been applied by Hollnsteiner in her examination of the political dynamics in Bulacan albeit with a more cultural flavor. Hollnsteiner identified in her examination of a municipality in the Province of Bulacan that family, kinships, and patron-client relations are the major elements that matter in political factions.⁸

⁷ Ibid., 736.

⁸ Kerkvliet, Benedict. "Toward a More Comprehensive Analysis of



It must be emphasized though that Hollnsteiner highlighted the role of the principle of reciprocity in her analysis of political dynamics. Maintaining fidelity to her anthropological orientation, the rendition of the patron-client relationship framework she proposed is something that emphasizes the cultural concept of *utang na loob*, which she, rightly or wrongly, viewed as something similar to or something that evokes reciprocity. Such underpinnings are founded on her earlier fieldwork in a municipality (called Tulayan) in the same province. The practice of *utang na loob*, being a core value in social relationships among Filipinos, is what governs and reifies the patron-client ties in politics as she contended. The significance of this value in Philippine social structure and organization can be summarized as follows:

Every Filipino is expected to possess *utang na loob*; that is, he should be aware of his obligations to those from whom he receives favors and should repay them in any acceptable manner. Since *utang na loob* invariably stems from a service rendered, even though a material gift may be involved, quantification is impossible. One cannot actually measure the repayment but an attempt to make it, nevertheless, either believing that it supersedes the original service in quality or acknowledging that the reciprocal payment is partial and requires a further payment.⁹

Being a central force in the culture of Philippine social organization and with the nature of the patron-client framework explained above, this principle of ‘*utang na loob* reciprocity’ plays a huge role in political dynamics. As a concept of reciprocity, it has been implied by Hollnsteiner that *utang na loob* is likened to ‘contractual obligation’ that is being characterized by material exchanges. This has been subsequently interpreted as the attached string, akin to a bind, that connects patrons to their clients. Political

patrons should provide for their clients, these clients, in turn, will give back and demonstrate gratitude by giving their patrons full support especially during election time. It has been argued in this lens that the relationships that this practice produces are so great that ‘debt of gratitude’ must be manifested for a lifetime.¹⁰ Whether the notion of *utang na loob* has been properly construed in all of its nuances as it is applied in this framework is something that this paper will explore towards the concluding part.

BEYOND PCF FRAMEWORK

Despite the overwhelming acceptance of the PCF framework demonstrated by the number of studies in political science literature that utilized this lens, Kerkvliet pinpointed some of its shortcomings by showing the factors and political forces, if you may, that it somehow ignores. As one of the first to offer a comprehensive critique of the theory, Kerkvliet centers his contentions on two grounds. The first is his observation that the theory being so prevalent in current political science discourse has led to the framework becoming “so reified to the point that it itself has almost become Philippine politics, rather than being a useful perspective or interpretation for making sense of aspects of political life.”¹¹ It has been argued that since the theory had been so ordinary or every day in political science literature, at least in the Philippines, that its usage had been more of a depiction and characterization that universalizes what is supposedly fluid political dynamics rather than as a lens to view these dynamics. The second ground of Kerkvliet’s contention is pertaining more to the substance. It has been claimed that since there is a seeming over-emphasis on personal and familial relations that is anchored on patronage, it ignores and subsequently obscures some values and

Philippine Politics: Beyond the Patron-Client, Factional Framework.” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 26, no. 2 (September 1995): 401-419.

⁹ Hollnsteiner, Mary. “Reciprocity in the Lowland Philippines.” *Philippine Studies* 1, no. 3 (1961): 394.

¹⁰ Ibid., 394-395.

¹¹ Kerkvliet, “Beyond Patron Client”, 401.



political forces that are as significant as those that it initially captured. The contention of Kerkvliet in the level of the framework's substantive aspect:

is that the PCF framework minimizes, even dismisses values and ideas, bases for organization and cooperation, and cleavages and frictions except those of a personal, familial, patron-client nature. Because other values, ideas, organizations, and conflicts are marginalized and deemed unimportant, Philippine politics and its society and culture generally are portrayed in an overly simplistic, untextured manner. And Filipinos for whom other dimensions do in fact matter are similarly reduced to mere caricatures of their fuller, more complicated selves.¹²

It is in this premise that the author offered some aspects of Philippine politics that must also be considered if a truly comprehensive and coherent political analysis is to be made. Considering the dynamism of political struggles, Kerkvliet suggested that mere personal relationships and animosities, basic foundations of the PCF framework, are not enough to capture the bigger picture of politics and social organizations. It is in this line that he offered specific features of the political enterprise that must be considered.

While a certain degree of personality politics is noticeable in the conduct of politics in the country, elections, as claimed by Kerkvliet, are definitely more complex exercise than being reduced to mere personal ties bonded by patron-client relationships. Though it is undisputed that there are politicians who take advantage of the type of personal ties at play with the said framework as they conduct election-related activities, social, economic, and governance issues ubiquitous at the time of campaigning and the politicians' stand in those issues also matter. They may not be in a form of political ideology or collective stands, but individual aspirants' views about these issues are factors being considered

¹² Ibid., 401.

in an election. In proving this point, Kerkvliet provided some examples of local leaders and national politicians who had their way to political power by properly framing their views about the compelling concerns of the people.¹³

Another important aspect that Kerkvliet identified as being obscured by the framework is the role of political and social movements in the entire political dynamics both at national and local levels. He identified that the lens ignores the role in what he calls the 'politics of institution' in shaping political developments. These are the social institutions and/or organizations and social movements that may not have direct participation in the mainstream political realm but are nonetheless forces that can affect its outcome. This 'politics of institution' carries "a blend of values and ideas, bases of organization, and cleavages that fall within and outside a PCF framework."¹⁴

These are just among the many arguments raised by the author in trying to demonstrate a rethinking of the PCF framework and its applicability in assessing some of the main features of political exercises in the country. It must be noted though that the contentions raised by Kerkvliet in his comprehensive analysis of the PCF framework do not entail that he calls for total abandonment of this perspective. He only identified relevant factors that have been excluded in characterizing the complex nature of political affairs.

LOCAL POLITICAL BASES AND COLONIAL COLLABORATION

In a rather eloquent historical inquiry to the earlier foundations of contemporary Philippine State, Hutchcroft describes some of the

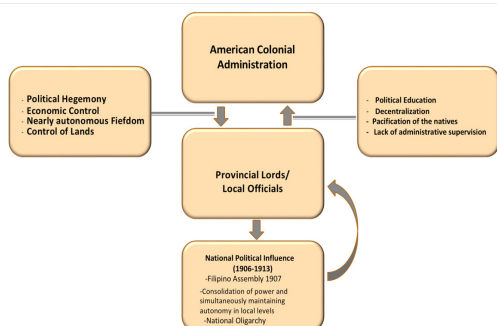
¹³ Ibid., 408-412.

¹⁴ Ibid., 414-415.



characteristics of currently existing political subtleties and attributed them to be the results of power struggles in local politics. Through a careful analysis of historical materials during the American colonial administration in the Philippines, Hutchcroft attributed the creation of national structures and institutions to the political occurrences at the local level. He maintained that political strategies and cleavages at the local level coupled with collaborative schemes of Filipino local political leaders with the colonial administrators are what defined the modern Philippine state. The main arguments of Hutchcroft can be graphically interpreted as follows:

Figure 2. Graphical Interpretation of the Colonial Masters, National Politicos, and Provincial Lords Thesis



As can be seen in the above graphical presentation, it can be construed that the foundation of the modern-day Philippine state and the consolidation of power that operates into it, which can be traced back to the American occupation of the Philippines particularly during the Taft era, had been laid down by two main groups i.e. the American colonial administrators and the local power-holders existing at the time. Such fashioning owes to the central-local ties that the American colonial administrators fostered in their establishment of the Philippine government structure. The ties that had been created “play a major role in both influencing the character of a national state and shaping the

manner in which central states and local forces relate to one another.”¹⁵

The government structure of the Philippines in the advent of American occupation had been mistakenly construed by the colonial masters as overly centralized. This interpretation roots from the view that the colonial legacy of the Spanish regime in the country concerning governance is an over-centralized system, akin to the system that then existed in mainland Spain. This had been one of the key components of a study conducted by the new foreign power as described by the report of the Schurman Commission in 1899. It was because of this initial view that the Americans, particularly during the Taft Era, stressed the imperative for decentralization and devolution. In fact, this had been the central theme in the Taft Commission report to the US Congress and then US President William McKinley to ‘political education’. It has been emphasized by the new colonial masters that what they call the ‘project of political education’ of the natives can best be attained through their participation in the local political landscape.

It must be noted, however, that the view of an over-centralized governmental and administrative structure towards the end of the Spanish colonization is not really the case. As claimed by Hutchcroft, the central government in Spanish Philippines towards the second half of the nineteenth century was struggling to take full control of the country for the reason that “the government based in Manila was so understaffed that it had to rely heavily upon ecclesiastical personnel to extend its reach throughout the archipelago.”¹⁶ This only shows that the political structure the former colonial power left upon

¹⁵ Hutchcroft, Paul. “Colonial Masters, National Politicos, and Provincial Lords: Central Authority and Local Autonomy in the American Philippines, 1900-1913.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 2 (May 2000): 279.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 283.



the Philippines was characterized by reliance on local political powers coupled with a very weak national or central control.

In the absence of clear parameters of central control that subsequently blended to the imperative for devolution, the initial organization of the Philippine state under American colonial administration laid the framework and authority to the local political elites and power-holders to establish their respective political bailiwicks that will continuously be maintained up to the contemporary political power structure in the country. With this background and facilitated by the establishment of elections at the provincial level,¹⁷ a more extensive, albeit stronger, intraprovincial ties among local political leaders had been established. These ties soon emerged as province-wide political forces that maintained very powerful influence both in their respective local bailiwicks and subsequently in the national political scene.¹⁸

As can be seen in figure 2, these local political actors had their way to power by demonstrating their dual capacities: their mastery in maintaining harmonious, which in a more blatant term can be referred to as collaborative, relationship with their newly-found colonial masters and their ability to take control of Filipinos within their respective jurisdictions. As alluded to, characterized by weak administrative control from Manila, local politicians enjoyed nearly 'autonomous fiefdoms' that claims hegemony to both local politics and local economy hence acquiring very strong political influence.

Such political influence of province-wide political actors even made its way to the national level. The creation of the national lawmaking

body to be composed of Filipinos in 1906-1907 known as Filipino Assembly, which in retrospect becomes the breeding ground for future national leaders, gave ample avenue for these politicians to expand their political power and influence. While simultaneously maintaining a stronghold to their respective political bailiwicks and while patronage and spoils permeated, local power-holders were able to consolidate their position in the national state and foster the creation of what in turn will become 'national oligarchy'.¹⁹

KINSHIP, FAMILIES, AND THE STATE

As can already be surmised with the preceding discussions, concepts pertinent to the creation of a state within the discourse of family and kinship are necessary for understanding political history, the development of institutions, and the different dimensions of political dynamics in the Philippines. Family-based approaches in viewing politics are undoubtedly one of the overly-used approaches in Philippine political science literature. These approaches carry the assumptions that families and kinships, being powerful socio-cultural organizations in the country, continuously shape political, legal, social, and government institutions. Such trajectory carries the notion that having a coherent view of the country's political landscape entails putting the familial institution as the locus of understanding the state. These underpinnings have been deployed in analyzing different sets of political exercises and political power dynamics both in national and local politics. However, it is always ensued that the former is dependent on the power dynamics of the latter. Among others, political dynasty, kinship network, economic familial hegemony, oligarchy, warlordism, and rent-seeking are just among the topics and concepts that usually go with the said strand.

¹⁷ This is something that did not exist during the Spanish colonial regime since the provincial officials are being appointed by the central authority.

¹⁸ Hutchcroft, "Colonial Masters", 287-290.

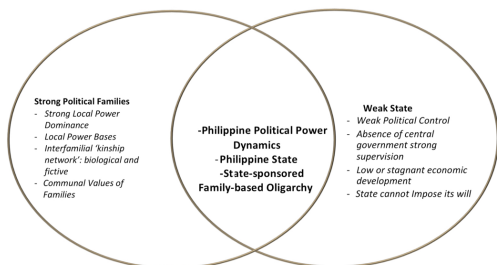
¹⁹ Ibid., 301-302.



STRONG FAMILIES, WEAK STATE THESIS

One of the most employed theses in examining Philippine local politics *vis a vis* central-local ties is the strong families, weak state thesis of Alfred McCoy that he formulated in his most celebrated work: *An Anarchy of Families*. Starting with a sustained analysis of the Philippines' kinship patterns, McCoy consolidated case studies of some political families in the Philippines and the factors that lead to, the manner as to how, and the actual conduct of their dominance in their respective local power-bases. Through an in-depth analysis of the cleavages, factionalisms, and strategies of these political families derived from both Latin-American literature and sociological and political studies in the Philippines, McCoy contends that the country's political development is a creation of prevailing influence of strong political families coupled with a state that has very weak control, if at all, hence 'strong families, weak state thesis. The interplay of the different factors included in the said thesis can be graphically presented as follows:

Figure 3. Graphical Interpretation of the Strong Families, Weak State Theory



The graphical interpretation above reveals that the contemporary Philippine state and the political dynamics it fashions are results of the power and influence of the country's family-based oligarchy that is derived from and subsequently contributed to a weak state. Drawing from multidisciplinary

studies about the interplay of Filipino families in politics and informed by theoretical bases in similar studies in Latin America, McCoy claims that through the application of a 'fluid' kinship relationships (biological and fictive) in Philippine social organizations, elite families were able to establish familial coalitions that help them maintain strong political hold and influence that strengthens their chance of retaining their political power whenever contested. With these strategies, these families were able to maintain their dominance to their respective localities preserving, along the process, both their political and economic interests. Moreover, the political power they demonstrate in their local bases translates to strong bargaining power to the central government in Manila that practically leaves them with a high degree of autonomy in their jurisdictions that leaves these places something akin to 'chiefdoms'.²⁰

Having strong political families alone is not sufficient to gain a huge amount of influence in the conduct of politics and governance. It is here that the concept of a weak state comes into play. The factors that have been identified in characterizing a weak state include very weak or even absence of political control from the center, low and stagnant economic development, and the pervading presence and practice of rent-seeking. The practice of rent-seeking pertains to the use of political influence to advance a particular individual's, in this case, family's, or group's economic interests. Rent-economy presupposes a state that has a very weak mechanism of control, so much so that it is governed not by the larger public's interest but by the interests of the selected few who hold political power. Does it define a system where the state's regulatory powers and its resources are being used or abused? for the advantage of the few, in this case, the powerful elite families.

²⁰ McCoy, Alfred. *An Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines*, 1st ed. (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila Press, 1994): 9-10.



These two contextualizations considered, coupled with center-local ties that manifest modes of patronage are what defines the Philippine state and what animates political dynamics. As McCoy himself contended: “since elite families and the state engaged in a reciprocal relationship that constantly defines and redefines both, we need to place kinship networks within the larger locus of Philippine politics.”²¹

IN AN EXTREME SENSE: BOSSES IN LOCAL POLITICS

Embarking on his initial analysis of the elements of warlordism in the Provinces of Cavite and Cebu²², John Sidel provides cognitive coherence to the vague concept of warlordism in Philippine politics. Extracting from the elements and the complex relatedness of these elements of political dynamics from his case studies, Sidel developed the concept of ‘bossism’. Political bosses, in Sidel’s terms, are “local power brokers who achieve sustained monopolistic control over both coercive and economic resources within given territorial jurisdictions or bailiwicks.”²³

While the thesis provided for by McCoy centers on rent-seeking, a political-economic perspective in his epistemological rendering of Philippine local dynamics, Sidel included the aspect of state coercive power in his analysis of local politics. The different elements that contribute to what he calls ‘monopolistic control’ over state resources can be graphically interpreted as:

Figure 4. Graphical Interpretation of Bossism



One peculiar difference between the analysis of McCoy to Sidel’s bossism is the view on state power. While McCoy claims that the state is weak, which strong political families take advantage of, Sidel demonstrated the strength of state power, which political bosses use to maintain hegemonic control in their respective jurisdictions. As shown above, the bosses’ source of power is practically coming from the strength of state influence.

Political control over a specific territorial jurisdiction, which can be municipal, district, or provincial level, is just one aspect of bossism. This political control however entails a stronghold in a particular local unit. Needless to say to attain such hegemony, dominance, and absolute hold to small-time political operators present in the area is necessary. Through the practice of strong patronage to the power-holders in the center, local bosses are also using the state’s regulatory powers and mechanisms to advance control over their local economy in the form of the monopoly of franchises and government concessions, among others, for personal gain. If in the preceding theories presented in the paper, affection through patronage system plays a huge part in maintaining local control, coercion rather than affection or status is the

²¹ Ibid., 11.

²² John Sidel’s case study of warlordism in Cavite Province under Justiniano Montano is included as one of the chapters of McCoy’s *An Anarchy of Families*. However, in developing his concept of ‘political bossism’, Sidel included a study of the political dynasties of Cebu Province.

²³ Sidel, John. “Philippine Politics in Town, District, and Province: Bossism in Cavite and Cebu.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 56 no. 4 (November 1997): 952.



main element concomitant to bossism. The local bosses use state machineries or state forces to coerce people thereby maintaining hegemony both in economic and political enterprises. The existence of this abuse of coercive power of the state by local bosses is essential in their aim of achieving electoral victory and economic strong-hold. Finally, since the coercive powers of the state are within the radar of the power of local bosses, most of them are also engaged in illegal activities. The factors that characterize bossism and the central-local political dynamics it produces can be summed up with Sidel's conclusion as informed by his analysis of certain political families in Cavite and Cebu, thus:

In both Cavite and Cebu, bosses have emerged and entrenched themselves when and where the commanding heights of the local political economy have lent themselves to monopolistic control. Insofar as such monopolistic control over the local economy has hinged on state-based derivative and discretionary powers, bosses have depended heavily upon superordinate power brokers, whose backing has underpinned their emergence, entrenchment, and survival, and whose hostility has spelled their downfall or death.²⁴

OBSCURITIES: IMPERATIVE FOR MODIFICATION, RECONSTRUCTION, AND DECONSTRUCTION

This paper has so far discussed the integral aspects and components of some of the prevalent theoretical underpinnings that have been used in analyzing Philippine local political dynamics. If the bases are the usefulness and predominance of these frameworks in offering conceptual and cognitive frames for a more coherent forbearing of political phenomena and their specificities, then as the title suggests, these are really worthy of being referred to as classics. Undoubtedly, the value for students of politics, scholars, and practitioners of these frames is indubitable.

²⁴ Ibid., 961.

However, it must also be noted that there are some nuances and complexities in light of the contemporary social and political developments that these theories fail to capture. After all, theories are developed to give cognitive clarity to man's experience of the world, in this case, his political experiences, consciousness, and aims. Connections to the reality of the phenomenon that these theories wish to explain must be clearly demonstrated for them not to be just scents in the air. In manifesting the need for a 'grounded' public administration theory, it has been contended that a marriage between theory and practice is necessary. Otherwise, the former will just lose its relevance and value, hence will lead to its obsolescence. This marriage must be characterized by grounding these frames to the experiences and realities of the very society they opt to explain.²⁵

In lieu of this, this paper attempts to identify some of the gaps in the form of identifying concepts and nuances that these former studies may not have properly captured in light of contemporary social and political developments. It is not in any way the aim of this paper to discredit nor to belittle the contribution of these frameworks to the existing body of knowledge in the field. Their contributions in shedding light on political dynamics in the Philippines are beyond reproach. It is only hoped that through the succeeding discussions, new topics can be explored for further studies, which perhaps can pave the way for some theoretical modifications, deconstruction, or even theoretical reconstructions. The realm of the political, after all, offers avenues for never-ending quests for meanings.

²⁵ Dela Cruz, Luisito. "Governing the Philippine Public: The National College of Public Administration and Governance and the Crisis of Leadership without Identity." *SCIENTIA* 9, no. 1 (2020): 50-68.



As clearly illustrated in this paper, the concept of political patronage has been one of the most fundamental foundations of all theories explored in this paper. As exemplified by the literature herein included, patronage has always been the grounding point of all the theories that attempt to offer an examination of local political dynamics and the central-local ties. While this view may be considered as proven in trying to offer valid depictions of some political practices in the Philippines, the overemphasis on it may obscure some equally important values and beliefs that also come into play in Philippine social organizations and their effects on the developments in the political arena.

While patronage politics induces modes of political decay in the analysis of inter-layer dynamics i.e. ties between national *politicos* and local *politicos*, it may have missed some socio-cultural implications in the Philippine society in depicting patron-client relationships at the grassroots level. Understanding political participation from the perspective of patronage merely reduces the political actors as 'passive' receivers of favours and material emoluments. It removes in the process vital social values pervading in Filipino culture such as the concepts of *kapwa*, *kapatiran*, *damay*, and *kabayanihan*, among others.²⁶ By describing the conduct of politics as only animated by patronage, the ability of political leaders in capturing the *loob* of their constituents through *pakikipagkapwa* and the long-standing socio-political wanting of the larger Philippine public for *buhay*, *ginhawa*, and *dangal* is likewise being removed into the equation.²⁷ While it is true that these values may not be the only factors that contribute to political participation, modes that are usually ignored and at some point even viewed with

pejorative connotations in describing Philippine political dynamics, they are real, now, and part of the social process.

For instance, as provided elsewhere in this paper, Hollnsteiner's PCF framework is grounded on the concept of *utang na loob*. This association of *utang na loob* to patronage politics clearly puts said concept in a bad light. While there may be some modes of patronage that have been observed to some politicians, describing *utang na loob* with such a negative sense is missing the point. It devolves the principle of its very essence. For one, *utang na loob* entails *pakikipagkapwa* that peaks to *pakikisalamuha* and *pakikisangkot*, qualities that are important in political leaderships.²⁸ An over-simplistic description of *utang na loob* in a political sense that is highly associated with patronage proves to be counter-productive. Henceforth, shedding light on the specificities of Filipino values and their implications to the political dynamics are areas that are ripe for scholars of political science to also pursue. This might even be an imperative towards deconstructions of certain reified conceptions.

Since most of the frameworks herein included are based on fieldwork in rural areas that are conducted decades ago, they may not have captured some recent socio-economic developments that may have tremendously affected political dynamics, specifically at the local level. For the past decade, provinces that were included in most of the studies²⁹ have undergone a significant level of economic development in the advent of the proliferation of export processing zones and growth in transportation and trade. These economic

²⁶ See for instance Pe-Pua's and Marcelino's discussions of Virgilio Enriquez's Sikolohiyang Pilipino and Albert Alejo's Tao Po: Tuloy, among others.

²⁷ See for instance Villan's analysis of Kabayanihan, 2013.

²⁸ Aquino, Clemen. "Mula sa Kinaroroonan: Kapwa, Kapatiran, and Bayan in Philippine Social Sciences." *Asian Journal of Social Sciences* 32, no. 1 (2004): 105-139.

²⁹ Bulacan for patron-client framework, Cebu and Cavite for bossism and Anarchy of Families, and Negros Occidental also for Anarchy of Families.



developments are obviously accompanied by certain changes that may have affected the formerly construed political dynamism of the PCF, bossism, strong families-weak state theses. Among others, access to basic and tertiary education, access to information (both coming from mainstream and social media), and the availability of political ideas offered by social movements and community-based organizations are just among the factors that accompany the transformations of social landscapes in the process of urbanization. Moreover, as the bossism and the strong families-weak state approaches may not have captured, the rapid expansion of infrastructure in most areas in the country connected the countryside better to the center, Manila, not to mention the opening of technology infrastructure that connects distant places in a click. These developments may have undermined some of the earlier assumptions of these two frameworks. While the central power of the state cannot easily reach some places decades ago, with these transformations, this same central power has definitely widened its grip. Again, these peculiarities are just some of the areas within the political economy that one can explore.

Another bell that keeps on sounding implications to political dynamics is the concept of kinship and family patterns that are integrated into most, if not all, of the theories discussed. It is a basic principle of anthropology that familial patterns and kinship networks are phenomena that are dependent on patterns and modes of settlement. If this is the case then, it is undeniable that recent developments in the Philippines saw significant transformations in this respect. Subdivisions and gated communities are little by little replacing the 'old compound type kinship settlements prevalent in the countryside. Inter and intra-provincial migrations have been one of the most observable social changes in the country, not to

mention the prevalence of international Filipino settlements elsewhere. This phenomenon definitely affects the conduct of politics both to the old hometown and the localities of destination of the migrants. The appeal of patron-client relations to personal and affective ties to people is undermined by this social development. The ties between local *politicos* and the kinship networks they have created in the old hometowns are undermined. In areas where migration and diasporas are prevalent, the realm of the political may have shifted from personal to expectations-based ties. Be that as it may, the influence of the transformations of settlement, at least at the time being, is more felt in praxis rather than in cognitive rendering. Political strategies will always consider these relative new patterns of settlements; new faces, new ties, and new approaches, in their political decision-making. As far as I know, this is a nuance that has yet to be captured by any political theory aiming to describe Philippine local politics, hence a possible area for future scholarly rendering.

This paper shares Kerkvliet's observations that some of the existing frameworks obscure the role of ideals, movements, and principles in understanding political dynamics. However, calls for the inclusion of the ideals, movements, and principles not just of heavily organized and instituted fronts but also of informal, community-based, and sectoral groups must also be emphasized. These informal organizations are also participants in the creation of political cleavages and factionalisms at the local level. These groups include the local Tricycle Operators and Drivers Associations (TODA), Jeepney Operators and Drivers Associations, Homeowner Associations (HOA), Urban Poor Groups, Women and LGBTQ++ communities, Associations of Pastors and Religious Groups, among others. Some of these groups are actively engaged in several areas of local governance.



Their capacity and capability to deliver support for a politician perhaps give them ample venue to advance their respective groups' interests and welfare; their ideals pushed into the mainstream and principles heard. These groups may at one point be lorded upon by local politicians, but with their bargaining powers and political support potential, they can also lord over them.

Finally, most of the frameworks included in this study are used in explaining what most political scientists call a 'political dynasty'.³⁰ Though the examination of political dynasty floods existing literature in local politics, its prevalence cannot be fully and solely attributed to the factors and components included in the theories herein scrutinized. A specific question can be pondered on in this respect: why even in the highly urbanized localities, where systems of patronage may not be the only factor of consideration in the political dynamics, dynasties also exist? Perhaps, one alternative perspective that can be considered by scholars of political science, something that lacks existing paradigms, is the politics of legacy. It is more clear than apparent that certain political actors in Philippine local politics maintain their hold to public office uncontested or unopposed. As much as some political families maintain power through violence, bending of law, intimidation, or even patronage as the theories above suggest, there may also be political families that use state power for landmark projects, meaningful programs, and for promoting welfare-state. The narrative of continuity and legacy may very well work in these instances. Hence, instead of outrightly dismissing a perspective that may offer an alternative lens in the prevalence of some political families in certain localities due to ideological and existential opposition to its existence, a researcher can initiate new ways of

framing, restructuring, and understanding this political nuance than just settling to what has been offered by existing frameworks if the data to be gathered so permit.

Classics as they are, no one particular theoretical lens in political science, or any other social sciences for that matter, can capture the overall picture of a phenomenon in its table. There will always be nuances, complexities, and subtleties that will be left out, missed, overlooked, or just simply ignored. No scholar can ever claim that his is an all-encompassing theoretical assumption that will absolutely capture the whole picture of a phenomenon, not to mention the entire complexity of political dynamics. As cited in the early part of this paper, politics, just like human political consciousness, is an enterprise characterized by fluidity, spontaneity, and compromises. It is the task then of the man of letters to always review existing frames of cognition; modify them if needed, deconstruct if necessary, and reconstruct new ones if possible. If fidelity of epistemological grounding rests on its ability to offer meanings and abstractions based on realities, in this case, the conduct of politics, then like these realities it wishes to define, it is also subject to change and modifications. Moreover, as earlier emphasized in the introduction, these theories, however classic, do not exist in a vacuum. They are developed based on their own subjectivity and historicity. They are conceptualized in particular social, economic, political, and even cultural milieu. As these landscapes are ever-flowing, never constant, then like them, theories must also acquiesce.

³⁰ The concept of *Politica de Familia* might be a better term. Though this is another story, something that can be explored in a different study.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abueva, Jose. "Review on Southern Voting, 1946-1963." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 6, special issue 2 (September 1975): 222-224.
- Alejo, Albert. *Tao Po! Tuloy!: Isang Landas ng Pag-unawa sa Loob ng Tao*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Office of Research and Publications, 1990.
- Aquino, Clemen. "Mula sa Kinaroroonan: Kapwa, Kapatiran and Bayan in Philippine Social Science." *Asian Journal of Social Sciences* 32, no. 1 (2004): 105-139.
- Dela Cruz, Luisito. "Bridging the Discipline and Practice of Public Administration in Philippine Governance: Concerns and Prospects of the National College of Public Administration and Governance." *Scientia* 9, no. 2 (2020): 22-38.
- . "Governing the Philippine Public: The National College of Public Administration and Governance and the Crisis of Leadership without Identity." *Scientia* 9, no. 1 (2020): 50-68.
- . "Philippine Studies: Theory, Methodology, Perspective, and Praxis." *Assumption College Faculty Research Journal* 19, no. 2 (2012): 1-18.
- Geoghegan, Anne Marie. "Elements of Philippine Politics: Tow View." *Philippine Studies* 17, no. 3 (1969): 605-616.
- Kerkvliet, Benedict. "Toward a More Comprehensive Analysis of Philippine Politics: Beyond the Patron-Client, Factional Framework." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 26, no. 2 (September 1995): 401-419.
- Hollnsteiner, Mary. *The Dynamics of Power in a Philippine Municipality*. Quezon City: Community Development Research Center, University of the Philippines, 1963.
- . "Reciprocity in the Lowland Philippines." *Philippine Studies* 9, no. 3 (1961): 387-413.
- Hutchcroft, Paul. *Strong Patronage, Weak Parties: The Case for Electoral System Redesign in the Philippines*. Australia: Australian National University, 2020.
- . "Colonial Masters, National Politicos, and Provincial Lords: Central Authority and Local Autonomy in the American Philippines, 1900-1913." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 2 (May 2000): 277-306.
- Lande, Carl. *Leaders, Factions, and Parties: The Structure of Philippine Politics*. New Haven: Southeast Asian Studies, Yale University, 1965.
- . "Parties and Politics in the Philippines." *Asian Survey* 8, no. 9 (September 1968): 725-747.
- . "The Philippine Political Party System." *Journal, Southeast Asian History* (1967): 19-39.
- McCoy, Alfred. *Anarchy of Families: State and Family in the Philippines*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila Press, 1994.
- Pe-Pua, Rogelio and Marcelino, Elizabeth. "Sikolohiyang Pilipino (Filipino Psychology): A Legacy of Virgilio G. Enriquez." *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* 3 (2000): 49-71.
- Roces, Mina. "Kinship Politics in Post-War Philippines: The Lopez Family, 1945-1989." *Modern Asian Studies* 34, no. 1 (2000): 181-221.
- Sidel, John. "Philippine Politics in Town, District, and Province: Bossism in Cavite and Cebu." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 56, no. 4 (November 1997): 947-966.
- Tadem, Teresa and Tadem, Eduardo. "Political Dynasties in the Philippines: Persistent Patterns, Perennial Problems." *South East Asia Research* 24, no. 3 (2016): 328-340.
- Villacorta, Wilfrido. "Western Influences on Social Science Teaching in Philippine Universities." *Philippine Journal of Psychology* 13, nos. 1-2 (1980): 65-73.
- Villan, Vicente. "Ilub, Unong, at Amok: Pag-Unawa sa Katatagan ng Buut ng mga Bayan isa Himagsikang Pilipino sa Panay, 1896-1898." *DIWA E-Journal* 1, blg. 1 (Nobyembre 2013): 57-92. <http://www.pssp.org.ph/diwa/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/06-Artikulo-Villan.pdf>

