

## Divided Clan Politics

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This 1998 elections, we find the usual families slugging it out in the electoral arena — Padilla versus Pimental in Camarines Norte, Alfelor against Villafuerte in Camarines Sur, Tan against Loong and Tulawie in Sulu, and the all too familiar names of Marcos, Cojuangco, Durano, Dimaporo, Remulla, Lobregat and so on running for various posts. Evidently, elite families with their kinship networks have yet to be replaced by the modern contraption known as political parties as prime movers of the electoral process.

But offering more stimulating sidelights to the clan wars are the feuds within. Take the case of the third-generation Osmeñas, heir to the name built by granddad Sergio, Commonwealth president from 1944-1946. Current senator Sergio III is the Liberal Party's vice-presidential candidate. On the other hand, brother Tommy, who was former mayor of Cebu, is campaign manager of cousin and presidential candidate Emilio "Lito" Osmeña. Lito, former Cebu governor and Lakas fundraiser, is running under the newly formed PROMDI (Probinsya Muna Development Initiatives) party. Lito's brother John ("Sonny"), is one of 12 candidates in the joint LDP/LAMMP senatorial slate. So will they end up voting for each other anyway? Maybe not, judging from Sonny's bitter words about brother Lito's corruption.

Cebuanos are probably immune by now to this sort of in-fighting within bigwig clans such as the Gullases, Cuencos and Duranos. After the death of patriarch Ramon Durano of northern Cebu, son Jesus won as mayor in a contest fought against his own mother, Beatriz Duterte-Durano, in the 1992 elections. Previous to this, in the 1988 elections, Ramon himself ran and won as mayor against another son, Thaddeus.

The 1992 elections also witnessed a brother and sister squabble for the same congressional seat — Nueva Ecija's Victorio Lorenzo against sister Julita Lorenzo Villareal. Brother won. In La Union, the Ortega clan saw two scions vying for governorship with Justo Ortega Orros winning against cousin Joaquin Ortega.

This time around, variations to the discordant family theme include the last minute filing of candidacy of Imee Marcos for the second congressional district of Ilocos Norte. Imee will run against Simeon Marcos Valdez, her granduncle. Imee's lolo, Mariano Marcos, is first cousin of Simeon Valdez.

President Fidel Valdez Ramos's mother is the sister of Simeon, which makes Fidel the cousin of Ferdinand Marcos whose wife Imelda is running for president against Fidel's anointed, Jose de Venecia.

Meanwhile, in Ilocos Sur, incumbent governor Luis "Chavit" Singson hopes to keep his seat against cousin-challenger Eric. Eric has served three terms as congressman, therefore disqualifying him under the 1987 Constitution to run for another consecutive term. It appears that legal impediments to uninterrupted enjoyment of power has upset an otherwise fair division of spoils among loving kins. This is the first match between Singson since historically, they were staunchly united against their political archrivals, the Crisologos — who are, in typical hometown fashion, also their relations.

The Hijosa couple at least offers a case of reconciliation. Medeen Hijosa was all set to run against estranged husband and incumbent mayor Donanito of Cuartero, Capiz. The wife gave up the plan after holding talks mediated by Capiz political matriarch Judy Araneta Roxas, who happened to be her close friend. The couple's reconciliation was clinched by an overnight stay in a hotel in what was billed publicly as their second honeymoon.

Pathetic is the case of the old man Pablo Cuneta, 88 years old. Cuneta ruled Pasay City for 46 years and now his wife and children are all too eager to fill in his shoes. There are Edgardo and Generosa, children by the first wife, Generosa, now deceased; Freddie, offspring from another woman; and finally, Elaine, the second wife and mother of megastar actress-singer Sharon. Pablo's vice-mayor and the children by the first wife have been wanting to have Pablo declared mentally unfit to continue his term due to old age and disease. But wife Elaine insists on keeping him there in order to, detractors feel, extract more leverage for her own political ambitions. Elaine ran for congress in 1995 but lost. In the end, no Cuneta will run for mayor this year. But one son from each of the two wives is running for a slot in the City Council, along with a grandson and a granddaughter. Elaine is running for Congress while Edgardo hopes to be vice-mayor. The slates or parties under which they are all running provide an interesting study of multi-partyism within the same family.

Why the intra-clan feuds? Simple mathematics could offer a logical explanation. Since the Commonwealth period, there are now as many as three generations descended from the leadership of that time. Bilateral kinship ties of Filipino families ensure that after each generation, there is an exponential increase in the number of blood cousins. Multiply these further by intermarriages with other clans and you have overlapping, inter-

generational kinship ties. Add to these ties children born into second or third families, whether as a result of widowhood (as in the case of Osmeña and Macapagal), or wanton virility usually associated with power (the Cuneta case, for example). Unfortunately for them, the number of posts has not increased at the same rate as the growing brood of relations, each one an heir to the family name.

Strong family traditions nurture the political ambitions in the brood, in the same way that we find generations of families of lawyers and doctors. But while non-politician children continue their respective family professions due to a sense of filial duty or even for pragmatic considerations (who will inherit the law books? the hospital?) political families, one might say, are driven further by a bloated sense of destiny.

This destiny is no doubt alluring. It promises fame and fortune and, within the family and the admiring public, the honor of carrying on with the legacy. It places one's name and face in the newspapers and even the history books. Government office vests one with power and prestige, not to mention the countless opportunities to build up one's personal wealth.

Not surprisingly, many want the post and everything that goes with it. Throw in the sycophants and hangers-on to convince their boss that s/he has what it takes to be president, governor, senator or mayor. Put in the all too familiar phenomena of sibling rivalry, jealous mistresses or spurned wives, and what we have is the cacophony of families.

If one thing good could come out of divided clans, it's that voters hopefully would look for the programs behind the names. Competitors will have to show their edge against their relatives beyond simply riding on the crest of their family prestige.

Electoral reforms could also generate more internal competition among ambitious clans. Note how the limits on consecutive terms (three three-year terms for the House of Representatives and local government offices, two terms for the Senate, one six-year term for the presidency) have already intensified the competition. Once the anti-dynasty bill — which proposes a ban on persons seeking an elective post if s/he has relatives within third degree of consanguinity who sit in an elective post in the same legislative district, province, city or town — is passed, the stakes would become even higher and the space narrower to accommodate all the egos of these scions.

The family drama that will spin off out of these internal rifts will surely make Philippine elections an even richer source of material for soap operas.☼