



## Family and Politics in an Archipelagic Province: The Moreno Dynasty in Postwar Romblon, 1949–1969

KRISTOFFER R. ESQUEJO

**ABSTRACT.** Through documentary sources and oral interviews, this article examines the vital role played by Romblon's distinct features as an archipelagic province on its local politics, particularly the rise and fall of the Moreno dynasty. The elder brother was Florencio Moreno, a government civil engineer who served as Romblon's congressman and was later appointed secretary of the Department of Public Works and Communications (DPWC) in the Magsaysay and Garcia administrations. The younger brother was Jose D. Moreno, a wartime military doctor who succeeded his elder brother as Romblon's congressman for three terms. From 1949 to 1969, the Moreno dynasty monopolized the said position, effectively bringing progress and pride of place to their constituents and figuratively putting Romblon on the Philippine map. While the brothers represent the emergence of professional politicians in Philippine postwar politics, their respective political careers were still largely restricted by the combined factors of geography, demography, and kinship dynamics of their home province. As a result, a sibling rivalry erupted which ultimately ended not only their political heyday but also shattered their economic interests.

**KEYWORDS.** Moreno dynasty · Romblon · kinship politics · public works · public health

### INTRODUCTION

Romblon is an archipelagic province geographically located in the center of the Philippines. It has a considerable distance from the capital, Manila, and, being composed of 158 islands and islets, remains relatively isolated in all directions—it lies west of Mindoro, south of Marinduque, east of Masbate, and north of Panay (figure 1). As a result, its people face perennial problems that might not be common in other land-locked provinces in Luzon and Mindanao. First, there is the problem of geography, which translates to interisland transportation and communication difficulties. Second, there is the problem of



Figure 1. Map of the Philippines and of Romblon. Source: Wikipedia maps by Eugene Alvin Villar (Philippines) and Mike Gonzalez (Romblon).

demography, which means a small voting population that would barely matter in national elections. Third, there is the problem of language, which further divides the people who strongly uphold kinship ties and conservative family values.

Presently made up of seventeen municipalities, Romblon has three main ethnolinguistic groups. First is Asi, largely spoken in five municipalities—in Banton, Corcuera, Concepcion, Odiongan, and Calatrava—where native surnames start with the letter F. Second is Romblomanon, commonly used in another five municipalities—Cajidiocan, Magdiwang, Romblon (the capital town), San Agustin (the Morenos' hometown), and San Fernando—where indigenous surnames commence with the letters M and R. Third is Unhan, dominantly spoken in the municipalities of Alcantara, Ferrol, Looc, San Andres, San Jose, Santa Fe, and Santa Maria—where local surnames start with the letter G (Esquejo 2010, 102).

In terms of local politics, it was the Asi group who was the first to become politically active during the Spanish colonial era. This could be explained by the fact that Banton, the known home island of Asi speakers, located in the northernmost part of the Romblon archipelago, was established as a Spanish pueblo in 1622. In fact, it was established as a pueblo nine years earlier than the capital town of Romblon (Madeja 1993, 124). As centuries went by, the Bantoanons migrated to neighboring islands and established communities despite the challenges of living and external threats. Highly conscious of their cultural identity and proud of their collective heritage, they are consistently recognized within the province as highly literate people and leading professionals in various fields (Fabella 1976, 4; Meñez 1998, 25-30).

Therefore, it was no wonder why Leonardo F. Festin, an Asi-speaking lawyer from a land-holding family of Odiongan, became the biggest political name in prewar Romblon politics. In 1916, he was first elected as an assemblyman or *diputado* of the Third District of Capiz and later became a member of the Fourth Legislature (1916-1919). In 1919, a year after Romblon became an independent province, he again won the electoral mandate for the Fifth Legislature (1919-1922), and later managed to win seven subsequent reelections: Sixth Legislature (1922-1925), Seventh Legislature (1925-1928), Eighth Legislature (1928-1931), Ninth Legislature (1931-1934), Tenth Legislature (1934-1935), Second National Assembly (1938-1941), and Third National Assembly (1941-1946) (*Festin Story* 2001, 34-38).

Ironically, at the same time that the American colonial government was actively teaching the ideals of democracy and self-government to Filipinos, feudal-like politics emerged in Romblon, as Festin became the longest to hold office as an assemblyman in prewar Romblon. At the time, there were no term limits for elective posts and he was able to successfully monopolize the position while many other equally qualified leaders from other ethnolinguistic groups consecutively occupied the gubernatorial post. A critical study reveals that this became possible due to the patronage of Manuel L. Quezon, long-term senate president and the Philippine Commonwealth's first president (Esquejo 2014, 89-93).

Remarkably, Festin only experienced two electoral defeats in his entire political career as a high-ranking member of the ruling Nacionalista Party (NP). First was in 1935, when he was beaten by Gabriel F. Fabella, a neophyte lawyer and University of the Philippines (UP) history instructor from Banton. The outcome was so unacceptable for Festin that he filed an electoral protest against Fabella's victory but failed to overturn the result to his favor. Second was in 1946, when he lost to Modesto F. Formilleza, a deputy collector of the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR). The second defeat was so devastating that it ultimately ended his three-decade-long political career (Fabella 1998, 50-62; *Festin Story* 2001, 45-46, 51, 65).<sup>1</sup>

Unlike his own townmate and predecessor, Formilleza was born to a poor family in Odiangan. From a working student, he rose through the ranks to become a lawyer and taxation expert. Since he studied in Capiz during his early days, he had developed a strong connection with Capiz native Manuel A. Roxas, a long-standing presence in the political scene who eventually became the first postwar Philippine president (Fabella 1998, 22). In fact, it was the latter who convinced him to run as representative under the Liberal wing of the NP (later renamed as the Liberal Party) in 1946. Due to the popular

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1. In 1940, Assemblyman Festin sponsored Commonwealth Act 581, which converted Romblon into an irregular province composed of only of four special municipalities: Romblon, Maghali, Sibuyan, and Tablas (ROMASITA). The so-called Festin Bill was viewed by many historians as an experiment in local government during the Commonwealth period, as Romblon would still receive financial subsidy and privileges from the national government. An additional feature was that the interior secretary would serve as the governor ex-officio of the province. Since this was also perceived as Festin's political tactic to simply perpetuate himself in power, it became a big electoral issue in 1946, which finally resulted in his downfall.

demand for change of leadership, he garnered 7,816 votes against Festin's 4,374 votes. As Romblon's representative, he became the chair of the Committee on Ways and Means, and was responsible for the enactment of two laws: the National Revenue Code of the Philippines and Republic Act 38, which restored the regular status of Romblon as a province.<sup>2</sup>

However, Festin did not easily give up, as he desperately wanted political vengeance against Formilleza. A few months before the 1949 elections, he finally convinced Juan Quirino M. Moreno to let his firstborn son, Florencio, try his luck in local politics under the opposition banner of NP. At the time, the late President Roxas had already been succeeded by the embattled President Elpidio Quirino of the Liberal Party (LP) while Formilleza sided with the Avelino wing of the same ruling party. It must be noted that the Quirino administration then was already heavily tainted with alleged rampant graft and corruption charges (Agoncillo 1990, 440).

The 1949 elections is a more significant turning point in Romblon political history. At the national level, the LP stayed in power, as Quirino won his own term as president. At the local level, Florencio Moreno did not simply oust Formilleza but his victory ended the more than three decades of supremacy of the Asi leaders, from Festin to Formilleza (1916-1949). It marked the rise of Romblomanon-speaking leaders largely dominated by the Moreno brothers (Fabella 1962, 72).

The Morenos' hometown has a complicated historical background. The many changes in its municipal place-name are somewhat a representation of the rise and fall of its political clans. Badajoz is located in the northeastern part of Tablas, the biggest island of the Romblon archipelago. The site was formerly known as Guintigui-an, the name of the town's northern river where a minute variety of fish without tongues, locally known as *tigue*, thrived and could easily be caught by means of crude nets. By 1855, Pueblo de Guintigui-an was formally organized by three migrants from Romblon, Romblon—namely: brothers Don Laureano Montesa and Don Luis Montesa, and a cousin, Don Esteban Montesa. At the time, it comprised three *visitas*: Guinpuc-an (now Barangay Carmen) in the north, Cagbagacay (now the municipality of Santa Maria) in the south, and Cabolutan (still a *barangay*) in the middle. In reality, it was only a successor pueblo to the

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2. Edna F. Formilleza, seventy-nine years old, interview by author, Cubao, Quezon City, June 27, 2009.

third visita, a formerly larger pueblo which was stricken by a serious small pox epidemic in the 1790s that almost wiped out its entire population. In 1868, Guintigui-an was renamed Badajoz on its feast day by a certain Spanish soldier named Andres Lebarde after his own hometown Badajoz in Spain (Prado 2005, 2-4, 21-25).<sup>3</sup>

For the next decades, the name Badajoz continued to be used to refer to the town and seemed to have been fully accepted by its residents, while its municipal jurisdiction underwent continual changes during the Spanish and American regimes. However, people from the neighboring towns jokingly rephrased its name to “bad host” after personally experiencing the seeming lack of hospitality of the town and the individualistic attitude of its inhabitants, particularly the elite, toward strangers and visitors during its annual feasts. On June 20, 1957, the town’s name was finally changed from Badajoz to San Agustin, in honor of its patron saint, through Republic Act 1660 by Rep. Jose D. Moreno. In recognition of this act, his younger sister Monica was unanimously crowned queen of San Agustin’s first town fiesta (Prado 2005, 5a).<sup>4</sup>

Eventually, San Agustin was further reduced in size, as two more municipalities were created from its territory: Calatrava (1968) and Santa Maria (1984). As of the 2010 census, it has a total population of 22,118, the fourth biggest out of Romblon’s seventeen municipalities. Currently, it is composed of fifteen barangays: Bachawan, Binonga-an, Buli, Cabolutan, Cagbo-aya, Camantaya, Carmen, Cawayan, Doña Juana, Dubduban, Lusong, Hinugusan, Mahabang Baybay, Poblacion, and Sugod (Esquejo 2014, 99; Esquejo 2010a, 38, 471).

Presently, San Agustin is predominantly a Romblo-manon-speaking town. Though the location was believed to have been first populated by Aetas, followed by the Mangyanes and Unhan Visayans from Panay during the earlier colonial periods, it was the migrants from Romblon Island who eventually succeeded in establishing it as a pueblo and later peopled it through a series of migration. As a consequence, they carried

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3. According to Prado (2005, 24), the renaming of Guintigui-an to Badajoz is misattributed to Don Jose Fernandez de Terran, the Spanish governor of the Romblon politico-military district from 1880 to 1883. Popularly known as cruel and abusive, he was believed to have ordered the forced conversion of the Mangyanes of Tablas to the Catholic faith. In response, most of these people disobeyed him by opting for mass migration to Mindoro.

4. Monica M. Hilario, seventy-seven years old, interview by author, San Agustin, Romblon, May 11, 2016.

with them their culture and language to their newfound home. The pull factor for them was that northern Tablas at the time was viewed as an ideal site for establishing new settlements, as it was abundant with fishing banks, fertile soil, thick forests, and lush mountains. This is the explanation as to why most of its current inhabitants carry surnames that start with the letter M, just like in the capital town of Romblon, a pattern that was originally implemented through the 1848 decree of Spanish Governor-General Narciso Claveria y Zaldúa (Prado 2005, 23; Esquejo 2010, 102; Agoncillo 1990, 94).

### KINSHIP AND POLITICS IN THE PHILIPPINES

Political dynasties have been the central theme of various publications. One classic example is McCoy (1994), which focused on the provincial elites and was published almost a quarter of a century ago. As a compilation of scholarly articles, it widely discussed several leading political families that arose from several provinces, including Bulacan, Cavite, Iloilo, Cebu, Lanao, and Maguindanao. The authors collectively concluded that most of these families chose violence and rent seeking in order to entrench themselves in politics and remain in national prominence even during the Philippine postwar and martial law eras (McCoy 1994). Though this book was ground-breaking in the study of Philippine political dynasties, it was somehow limited only to the historically well-known and economically affluent provinces. In fact, it only gave emphases to big political clans such as the Pardo de Taveras, Lopezes, and Osmeñas who were frequently tackled in mainstream Philippine history. Still, there is a pressing need to fill the considerable gap by doing similar scholarly research in other peripheral provinces whose provincial elite have also left an impact both on their respective areas and on the national scene.

One of the least discussed areas of political studies is Romblon. According to one political scientist, there are only two significant and noteworthy political dynasties from Romblon: the Festins and the Morenos. The Festins were fully dominated by one member (Leonardo) for a very long time, the Morenos were largely represented by two siblings side by side (Florencio and Jose Daniel). Moreover, the Moreno family is viewed as more powerful because it was not only a family of professionals but also a clan of landlords and businessmen (Simbulan 2005, 317). At the time, it was quite rare for a small province to have produced a political family that has members

occupying powerful positions in both the legislative and executive branches of the national government.

In looking for a parallel case of provincial elite, the Morenos of Romblon were to some extent quite similar to the Duranos of Cebu. First, both belonged to archipelagic provinces with considerable distance from the so-called “Imperial Manila.” Second, both the Moreno siblings (civil engineering and medicine graduates) and Ramon Durano Sr. (education graduate) were contemporaries and products of the premier state university in prewar Manila, UP. Third, the elder Moreno brother and the said Danao-based political patriarch both started as neophyte congressmen in 1949 (Cullinane 1994, 166–71).

However, this article argues that, unlike the Duranos and other members of the provincial elite, the Morenos were distinct as a postwar political family because they had very little to offer to any national figure as patron. It must be noted that the latter’s home province was neither a commercial nor an ecclesiastical center of its region. Though strategically situated in the central part of the Philippine archipelago, Romblon is not contiguous to any province and is isolated in all directions.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, it did not possess vast natural resources nor a big voting population of which the Morenos could take advantage for the accumulation of personal wealth or in exchange of state patronage from any sitting president (Esquejo 2010a, 1–3, 32–39).

In addition to this, Florencio or “Pensoy” (elected from 1949 to 1957) and Jose Daniel or “Joe” (elected from 1957 to 1969) came to power in an era defined by Western discourses that include “Christianity’s ethics and morals, the concept of loyalty to the nation-state, and the professionalism associated with the merit system in the modern bureaucracy” (Roces 2001, 45). First, they came from a devout Catholic family who hailed from a predominantly Catholic province. They even had a paternal uncle who served for a long time as parish priest of the Romblon capital. Historically, the Augustinian Recollects are solely credited for evangelizing the early Romblomanons in the first half of the seventeenth century as well as building fortresses for their defense during the so-called “Moro Wars.”<sup>6</sup> Second, the Moreno brothers were

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5. In a 1975 report of the US Bureau of Coast and Geodetic Survey, there are 158 islands and islets that make up the Romblon archipelago. However, only twenty-six of these have official names recognized by the government. See Prado (2005, 1–2).

6. For a detailed discussion of the Augustinian Recollect mission in Romblon during the Spanish colonial period, see Esquejo (2016).



recipients of American colonial education that taught them bureaucratic professionalism and responsibility in office. Under a meritocratic system, they were able to study and finish tertiary education in UP despite hailing from a marginal province. By complying with the professional civil service regulations, they were able to join government service and were elected to the legislature. Moreover, they sponsored public works and health-related bills, aiming for the efficient delivery of social services to the public. Third, they practiced the concept of loyalty to the nation-state, as manifested by their individual heroic wartime records. Pensoy worked in the construction of roads that became essential to the defense of Bataan against the Japanese forces while Joe served as a member of the guerilla medical corps in Panay despite the pressures and death threats suffered by their family.

Yet, how the Moreno siblings managed to keep themselves in power is a different story. Like other provincial elite, they were bound by *politica de familia*, a system that clashed with the Westernized views on politics and citizenship which were fostered on them. The concept is defined as one which “compels individuals to think in terms of family solidarity to the detriment of any other socio-political unit outside the family” (Roces 2001, 2-14). Serving as bond of the siblings, their father was instrumental in maneuvering the political careers of his sons while ensuring the success and survival of their provincial-based family businesses. Due to this paternal intervention, Pensoy and Joe were forced several times to compromise their Western values in the name of family. By prioritizing laws that benefitted many sectors of social services, fortified by the popular patronage of their businesses, the Morenos successfully managed to stay in power for twenty years.

By 1969, an unexpected turn of events took place. Joe, the younger brother, was running for his fourth term as the incumbent congressman under the Nacionalista Party (NP). At first, he was challenged by Esteban S. Madrona, a first cousin of his wife, who ran under the LP banner. Pensoy, the older brother, filed his own candidacy for the same position, posing a serious threat to his own kin. Though the family patriarch succeeded in convincing Pensoy to eventually withdraw, he did so only a day before the elections. This decision was not promptly made known to the voters in the neighboring islands. Expectedly, numerous ballots containing only the Moreno surname were considered void and were nullified by the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) at the expense of the incumbent, thus catapulting Madrona to victory.

Rumor had it that Pensoy secretly endorsed and supported his own brother's opponent.

The 1969 elections happened almost half a century ago. However, many questions and speculations remain unanswered and undiscussed, especially to the members of the younger generation in Romblon. Despite this, the Moreno descendants remain divided up to the present in terms of political affiliation while the Madrona children continue to rule this archipelagic province. Based on unpublished materials and several accounts published in newspapers, and strengthened by oral sources, it appears that sibling rivalry indeed caused the downfall of the Moreno dynasty.

This article attempts to present a new case study and contribute to the increasing discourse on Filipino political dynasties, since the idea of self-destruction caused by internal rivalry has not been deeply tackled in Philippine political history. In other words, it focuses not on a mere feud between families but on a feud within a family. Furthermore, it also puts forward the following points: first, the 1949 and 1969 congressional elections were both significant turning points in the political history of Romblon province, as these marked the rise and decline of Romblomanon-speaking leaders largely dominated by Pensoy and Joe.

Second, the demographic and geographic weaknesses of Romblon province have both made and unmade the political careers of the Moreno brothers. Somehow, having an archipelagic province with a small population as bailiwick has been, and still is, political baggage for professional bureaucrats-turned-local politicians who aspire for national political positions.

Third, the rivalry among the Moreno extended clan ultimately ended the political dominance and economic prosperity of the family. On one hand, the Moreno brothers' infrastructure projects were admired and imitated by later generations of Romblon political leaders and constituents. On the other hand, the competition between the two brothers paved the way for the rise of another provincial dynasty that endures up to the present.

Throughout the article, the term "Romblon" could refer to the entire province or to the town capital which bears the same place-name. In the same way, "Romblomanon" could mean the people of the whole province or one of the three main languages in this province.



Figure 2. Juan Quirino Montes Moreno, who was endearingly called “Tan Angki.” Author’s photo of the original portrait.

### ROOTS OF THE MORENO CLAN

The Moreno family attributes their economic and political ascent to the labors of their patriarch, Juan Quirino Montes Moreno, endearingly called “Tan Angki” (figure 2). Second child in a brood of five, his parents were Nicolas Moreno and Teodora Montes, pure-blooded Filipinos residing in a peripheral barrio of Badajoz, Romblon. Tan

Angki was described as short in stature with distinctively South Asian-like features (commonly called Bombay). From being a fisherman, he successfully rose from poverty through a rare combination of luck and frugality. Most of his winnings in cockpit fights were patiently saved by his housewife, Fidela Manalon, a Chinese mestiza, and were invested in a small *sari-sari* (convenience) store and copra business. In due course, the growing profits were used by the couple to buy tracts of land and other properties in their vicinity. Having a prospering economic base and being a sociable person, Tan Angki later joined local politics by serving as *teniente del barrio* and *presidente municipal* of Badajoz (1926–1928).<sup>7</sup>

During his early years, Tan Angki worked as a houseboy of a certain Spaniard who provided him with meager education in Manila. While acquiring a little knowledge of the Spanish language, he was also exposed to the political events at the time. In fact, he always bragged that he personally witnessed the execution of Dr. Jose Rizal in Bagumbayan. Because of their limited education, Tan Angki and his wife tried to give their children the best education they can afford, even to the extent of establishing schools. Tan Angki founded the Badajoz Elementary School in the town center. In 1948, he also joined his older brother Eduardo, also a former *presidente municipal*, and other prominent men of Badajoz to become the original incorporators and stakeholders of Tablas Academy, one of the earliest private high schools in Romblon (Fabella 1998, 118–19).<sup>8</sup>

Tan Angki and Fidela had eight children. When Fidela passed away, Tan Angki married Victoriana Magracia, a woman of modest background and was forty years younger than him. She continued the retail trade business of the first wife. Their union produced three more children. Having a growing family was never a problem to Tan Angki, as he was able to effectively manage both his entrepreneurial and political endeavors. Later, the family's business interests vastly expanded, as they also penetrated other industries at the local level, particularly

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7. Monica M. Hilario, seventy-seven years old, interview by author, San Agustin, Romblon, May 11, 2016; and Erlinda M. Chua, sixty-one years old, interview by author, Don Antonio Heights, Quezon City, May 27, 2016.

8. Three private schools were founded in 1948, largely through the initiative of Prof. Gabriel F. Fabella. These were Romblon College in Odiongan, Banton High School in Banton, and Tablas Academy in Badajoz and one public school, Looc High School in Looc.

public transport. At the outset, he purchased several barges for interisland transport from Badajoz to the Romblon capital. Then, he bought trucks and used them as public utility buses (forty units in its heyday), which became the nucleus of the Tablas Transportation Company (TABTRANCO) and served all Tablas towns. To beat the competition, he even bought the bus units of his neophyte business rivals. Eventually, he set up a gasoline station in Badajoz to monopolize the supply and distribution of petroleum products throughout the island. He later became popularly known as a self-made man and was dubbed “Don Juan” by his fellow Badajoznons. All of his children were sent to reputable Manila-based schools such as the University of Santo Tomas (UST) and UP. As expected, the children’s education and choice of profession were largely shaped by the father’s decision, aligned with the family’s political and economic interests. Later on, most of them became professionals in their own right and became sources of pride of their family and municipality: three businessmen, one engineer, one doctor, two pharmacists, and one who became vice president of the Philippine National Bank (PNB).<sup>9</sup>

### CAREERS OF PENSOY AND JOE

Pensoy was born on November 7, 1907, in Badajoz, Romblon. As the oldest son, he was the second among the eight children from his father’s first marriage. His siblings were Tasiana, Dioscora (Morales), Juliana (Nepomuceno), Lilia (Madali), Jose Daniel, Felonila, and Felices. His half-siblings were Rosita, Monica (Hilario), and Juana. He first studied at Badajoz Elementary School, then secured his secondary education from Asilo de San Vicente de Paul in Manila. Later, he took up civil engineering in UP and graduated fourth in his class in 1929.<sup>10</sup> In the same year, he passed the civil service board examination, and a year later, ranked second in the civil service examination for government assistant civil engineers. Five years later, he ranked eleventh in the civil

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9. Jaime M. Nepomuceno, sixty-four years old, interview by author, San Agustin, Romblon, May 27, 2009; and Felices M. Moreno, eighty-three years old, interview by author, San Agustin, Romblon, May 27, 2009.

10. Florencio Moreno (CE '29) was the first civil engineering alumnus of the UP College of Engineering elected to the Lower House. He was followed by Felix Fuentesbella of Camarines Norte (CE '36) and Jose L. Lachica of Sorsogon (CE '38).

service examination for senior civil engineers (Moreno 1969a,1; Moreno 1969b, 7).

Before entering politics, Pensoy had already been serving in government as a career civil engineer for quite some time. While still a student in UP, he started working as an engineering assistant in Pangasinan. Gradually, he held various positions in several engineering districts. In Quezon City, he was assistant civil engineer (1929–1935), senior civil engineer (1935–1938), project engineer (1938–1939), and assistant city engineer (1939–1940). Then he became a district engineer of Bataan (1940–1941). During World War II, he occupied both vital positions of city engineer of Baguio City and provincial engineer of Benguet (1943–1945). This was followed by his designation as provincial engineer of Romblon (1945–1946), his home province, and Ilocos Sur (1946), and was finally promoted as superintendent of irrigation (1946) and district engineer (1947–1949) of La Union (Moreno 1969a,1; Moreno 1969b, 8).

According to James J. Halsema, Pensoy was one of the young, brilliant Filipino engineers who were under the direct tutelage of his late father, Eusebius Julius Halsema, a colonial engineer and former mayor of Baguio City. In fact, Pensoy was part of a survey team which conducted a thorough inspection of roads from Kilometer 21 to Bokod and other road projects that required voluntary work. Due to Pensoy's ability, he endeared himself to Halsema and was personally chosen to supervise the improvement of main roads.<sup>11</sup> In 1938, he and his team successfully extended the road another 50 kilometers, which was previously a two-way path covered with gravel and sand. In addition to this, he was positively described by Halsema's son:

Moreno was a member of a generation of Filipinos who had grown up in the American era and felt thoroughly at home in it. They had not experienced the snubs and racial slurs that many *pensionados* earlier encountered in the United States. Moreno had American teachers in elementary and high school and had no difficulty in dealing with his American professors, headed by Dean Hyde, at the UP. He knew their

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11. Engineer Moreno regarded Mayor Halsema, his former boss, as his second father. He lived in the upper floor of Halsema's office until he married Rosario Llorca, a Romblon-born mestiza whom he met at a dance in Baguio Auditorium. As a fitting tribute to the American official, he co-authored with Rep. Dennis Molintas of Benguet a bill renaming the mountain trail from Baguio City to Bontoc, Mountain Province, as the Halsema Mountain Road. This was RA 933, which was passed on June 10, 1953.



Figure 3. Florencio "Pensoy" Moreno's campaign rally in Alcantara, Romblon when he ran for Congress. Photo courtesy of Firmalo family.

language and culture well. Moreno quickly learned those of the Mountain Province as well . . . Halsema liked this personable, efficient young man who did not hesitate to express his opinions. They usually were right. (Halsema 1991, 223)

Equipped with a strong academic foundation and extensive hands-on field experience, Pensoy became an able government administrator wherever he was assigned. As the project engineer of the so-called Diliman Estate, he was largely responsible for the construction of major buildings in the newly built Quezon City, which was envisioned then to be the future national capital. In 1939, he also had a pivotal role in the layout and construction of a circumferential highway in Metro Manila, now popularly known as Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA) (Carunungan 1982, 32).<sup>12</sup>

Joe was born on July 21, 1915, in Badajoz, Romblon. As stated earlier, he was the sixth among all the eleven children of Tan Angki. All his life, he was a product of the public school system. Like his elder brother, he first studied at Badajoz Elementary School in their family's hometown. He then transferred to the Romblon capital where he took his secondary education from then Romblon High School (now Romblon National High School). Later, he moved to Manila where he took up and finished the degree of Medicine in UP in 1939.<sup>13</sup>

During World War II, Joe voluntarily joined the medical corps of Free Panay Guerilla Forces as a medical doctor. With a rank of captain (later major), he served as the regimental surgeon of the 66th Infantry (BERLIN). Later, he was also designated as the chief of the 66th Medical Company. On June 8, 1944, he was chosen as one of the faculty members of the newly opened BERLIN Officers' Troop School (BOTS) based in Oquendo, Balete, Aklan. He taught the subjects of First Aid, Field Hygiene, and Sanitation to the noncommissioned officers of the 66th Infantry. Before the war ended, he joined Captain Teofilo Zosa in the construction and management of a base hospital for the Filipino forces. Most of his subordinates in the said hospital were

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12. Before this circumferential highway was named after an illustrious historian from Rizal province, it was previously called the North-South Circumferential Road. In 1946, it was renamed Avenida de 19 de Junio in honor of the national hero. In the 1950s, it was again renamed Highway 54, but due to the clamor from Rizal province residents, it was renamed after Epifanio de los Santos in 1959 through RA 2140. Presently, it is the longest and most congested highway in the metropolis.

13. Erlinda M. Chua, sixty-one years old, interview by author, Don Antonio Heights, Quezon City, May 27, 2016.



also his fellow Romblomanons (Manikan 1977, 412, 525-26, 599, 647).<sup>14</sup>

Like Joe, Pensoy also had relatively unknown but crucial acts of patriotism during the war. While in Bataan, he and his personnel were able to hasten the completion of roads from Pilar to Bagac as well as other main provincial routes which traverse the peninsula from east to west. In other words, these proofs of his efficient service somehow helped the speedy movement of the USAFFE troops while resisting the advance of the enemy troops (Halsema 1991, 224, 279).

A few years later, Pensoy had already secured two factors that would make him a viable candidate for an elective position. First, he had gained wide experience in dealing with ordinary people during his pioneering work in the Cordillera region. Second, there was a strong clamor for public works at the time, which became his vow for the electorate of Romblon.

In the 1949 elections, Pensoy ran under the NP banner and garnered a total of 8,021 votes against the incumbent congressman, Modesto F. Formilleza, who only mustered 7,230 votes. In the 1953 elections, Pensoy won again by a slim margin—securing 10,642 votes over LP bet Governor Jovencio Q. Mayor, a relative by affinity, who got 10,019 votes.<sup>15</sup>

The mayor of San Agustin from 1968 to 1971, Abundio M. Montesa Jr., vividly remembered how he and his younger town mates passionately campaigned for Pensoy's first electoral campaign (figure 3). In his view, those days were quite different from today, as local elections then were fairly conducted:

As early as 1948-1949, I was already involved in politics. I was in high school then, when the late Engr. Florencio Moreno ran for Congress against the incumbent Cong. Modesto Formilleza. The youths of San Agustin (formerly Badajoz) organized themselves into a united group called the United Sons of Badajoz. Some of the members were already of voting age while others like myself were not yet of voting age. We campaigned in the different barangays (called barrios before) and in the

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14. Doctor Moreno himself conducted a postmortem autopsy on the body of Maj. Jesus Jizmundo, commander of the 66th RCT 2nd Battalion who was mortally hit by a shrapnel while attacking the Iloilo Trade School on February 8, 1945. Though the latter was brought to the hospital, he died afterward. See Manikan (1977, 674).

15. Edna F. Formilleza, seventy-nine years old, interview by author, Cubao, Quezon City, June 27, 2009; and Jovencio Ll. Mayor Jr., sixty-two years old, Banaue, Quezon City, January 12, 2010.

different municipalities in the whole province. In our campaigns, the group contributed money, foodstuffs, etc. necessary in the campaign. We did not ask [for] anything from the candidates because we know they were poor and really hard up in their campaign. The voters did not ask [for] anything from the candidates, instead they gave what they can give to the candidates. There were no flying voters. The teachers who composed the election committees were honest and did their work well. There were no vote buying. No “*dagdag bawas*” [vote padding and shaving]. There were no corrupt practices in those days.<sup>16</sup>

However, Pensoy’s long-term political goal was not to remain merely as Romblon’s representative. Most of his priority projects and legislations were focused on the twin sectors of transportation and communication, revealing his ambition to run for higher office. As a neophyte member of the 2nd Congress (December 30, 1949–December 8, 1953), he only served as a member of several house committees such as Appointments, Public Works, and Commerce and Industry, and was the main proponent of just one bill, RA 917 (also known as the Philippine Highway Act of 1952) (Moreno 1969b, 4–5).<sup>17</sup> However, he significantly improved his legislative performance during his second term. By 1953, he was unanimously elected by his colleagues as committee chair on public works and served as a committee member of Government Enterprises, and Presidential Committee for Programming and Planning of Roads.<sup>18</sup> Due to his notable record in

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16. Abundio M. Montesa Jr. seventy-seven years old, interview by author, San Agustin, Romblon, October 22, 2008.

17. Pensoy gave a lackluster performance in the Second Congress when he first met the big names in Philippine politics at the time: Floro Crisologo (first district, Ilocos Sur), Arsenio H. Lacson (second district, Manila), Jose B. Laurel Jr. (third district, Batangas), Diosdado Macapagal (first district, Pampanga), Ramon Magsaysay (Zambales), Ferdinand E. Marcos (second district, Ilocos Norte), Emmanuel N. Pelaez (Misamis Oriental), Eugenio Perez (second district, Pangasinan and House Speaker), Arturo M. Tolentino (third district, Manila), and Cornelio T. Villareal (second district, Capiz).

18. Through Pensoy’s membership in, and later chairmanship, of various committees in the Third Congress, the following laws were passed: RA 544 (Civil Engineering Law), RA 545 (Architects’ Law), RA 780 (School Construction Fund Apportionment Act), RA 1216 (Amendments to the Portworks Act), RA 1294 (Artesian Wells Act), RA 1383 (National Waterworks and Sewerage Authority Law), and RA 2000 (Limited Access Act). He also initiated the enactment of the Continuous Five-Year Infrastructure Program of Expenditures and the documentation of projects funded by the so-called pork barrel. He coauthored RA 1000, allocating PHP 1 billion as government guarantee to productive projects such as concrete roads, irrigation systems, waterworks, long-term permanent bridges, airports, port works, and prefabricated school buildings (Moreno 1969b, 5–6).



Figure 4. President Ramon Magsaysay and DPWC Sec. Florencio "Pensoy" Moreno (fifth from left) with Romblomanon leaders. Photo courtesy of Firmalo family.

the Third Congress, he was shortlisted by the *Philippines Free Press* and the Congressional Press Club as one of the Ten Most Useful Congressmen (1954–1955). He also received certificates of recognition from the *Congressional Bulletin* as one of the Ten Most Excellent Parliamentarians of the Lower House and from the League of Women Voters of the Philippines for his firm stand against the systemic corruption in government spending for public works. In a May 22, 1954 article in the *Philippines Free Press*, Leon O. Ty praised his integrity and efficiency as a legislator, especially his tireless efforts against the evils of pork barrel:

He has continually advocated [for] the abolition of the pork barrel because of the known evils that [are] bred in the hands of politicians. As a result of the public works measures that he has sponsored during his five-year incumbency in Congress, many of the abuses in connection with the expenditures of public funds for roads, bridges, etc. have been eliminated. As a public works man, Moreno certainly knows his business. The Romblon congressman has authored many vital measures. He filed a bill providing for the advance planning of public works; another Moreno bill seeks to amend an existing law. This measure provides for the allocation of funds for the construction of elementary school buildings. There are only a few members of the House who can hold a candle to Moreno in the number of bills of vital importance sponsored during the last session. (Moreno 1969b, 9)

Pensoy's extraordinary legislative career led to his appointment as secretary of the Department of Public Works and Communications (DPWC), a highly coveted cabinet position, in 1955 by President Ramon Magsaysay (figure 4).<sup>19</sup> Despite having a weak political bailiwick, he was treated as an asset of Magsaysay's administration that even after the popular president's sudden demise, he was reappointed by President Carlos P. Garcia to the same position (figure 5).<sup>20</sup>

19. According to Gil Moreno, his father cheated death twice while in office. In 1949, he almost joined the convoy of former First Lady Aurora Aragon Quezon, which was ambushed in Bongabon, Nueva Ecija. In 1957, he almost ended up with Magsaysay's party to Cebu that ended in a plane crash. He was able to evade these accidents through last-minute changes in his decisions.

20. Other than DPWC, from 1955 to 1967, Pensoy was also interim chair of the Reparations Commission for government projects (1955–1957), two-time chair of the National Power Corporation (NAPOCOR) (1955–1963 and 1965–1967), vice chair of the board of directors of Philippine Airlines (PAL) (1955–1961), chair of the Screening Committee on Bond Issue Projects under the Council of State (1958–1961), chair of the Coordinating Committee that implemented the Marikina Multi-Purpose Project (1955–1961), and chair of both the Roxas Memorial Commission and the National Pantheon Board (1955–1961) (Moreno 1969, 6–7).



Figure 5. President Carlos P. Garcia and DPWC Sec. Florencio "Pensoy" Moreno (center) with Romblomanon leaders. Photo courtesy of Firmalo family.

At the local level, the people of Romblon definitely benefitted from Pensoy's legislative and executive positions. While serving as district engineer of Romblon, he initiated the circumferential road in Tablas Island. As both congressman and DPWC secretary, he was credited in building the first and only provincial airport in Tugdan, Alcantara, in 1956. Through his lobbying efforts, other circumferential roads on other islands were completed, while the ports in Poctoy (Odiongan), San Agustin, Romblon, Malbog (Looc), Ambulong (Magdiwang), and Carmen (San Agustin) were improved. Under his watch, municipal buildings in various towns were constructed, while telephone lines which connected all the towns of Tablas Island were installed. He prioritized the initial construction of two hospitals in the province—the Cajidiocan Emergency Hospital in Sibuyan and the Tablas Island Emergency Hospital in Tablas (Arac 1961, 24–27; Lota 1961, 14–15; Madrona 1961, 16–17; Montaña 1961, 18–21; Villanueva 1961, 22–23).<sup>21</sup>

Amidst these numerous acts of public service to promote the well-being of his own constituents, there was a popular negative perception of Pensoy and his public legacy. Many of his living contemporaries in Romblon believe that he did not fully maximize his political power and influence to wholly serve his fellow Romblomanons. They were not aware of Pensoy's greater plans which were disclosed only to close family members. In fact, it was part of his secret goal to introduce his name to more Filipinos as DPWC secretary by evenly distributing infrastructure projects nationwide. With his wide experience and intellectual prowess, he was confident in his ability to fulfill his dream. However, to his great dismay, he was not selected for the 1961 and 1965 NP senatorial slates due mainly to the fact that Romblon, his bailiwick, is a small and peripheral province with a very limited voting population.<sup>22</sup>

Other locales believe otherwise. Faustino Fabella Jr. recalls how the radio journalist Rafael Yabut used to attack Pensoy for sending valuable amounts of construction materials to the various islands of

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21. For a detailed discussion of infrastructure projects for Romblon's three major islands during Pensoy's term, see the entire issue of the *Technical Statistical Review* 5, no. 6 (November–December 1961).

22. Gil Ll. Moreno, sixty-seven years old, interview by author, San Agustin, Romblon, October 23, 2008; Felices M. Moreno, interview by author, eighty-three years old, San Agustin, Romblon, May 27, 2009; and Jaime M. Nepomuceno, sixty-four years old, interview by author, San Agustin, Romblon, May 27, 2009.

Romblon. Essentially, this became the basis of a political joke that Romblon might sink into the sea due to more than sufficient quantities of cement. Local folklore even has it that Romblomanons blamed Pensoy whenever there were earthquakes, thinking they were caused by the concrete bridges and heavy equipment brought to Romblon.<sup>23</sup>

As the worthy successor of his older brother, Joe was the longest-serving lawmaker of Romblon after Festin. In the 1957 elections, he ran under the same party as Pensoy and garnered 13,571 votes, besting three other rivals, LP candidate Governor Jovencio Q. Mayor who got 12,713 votes, Progressive Party of the Philippines standard bearer Governor Patriotismo Fondevilla who received 65 votes, and Nationalist Citizens Party bet Francisco Fabon who garnered 16 votes. Joe was reelected in 1961 with 19,745 votes over Mayor's 15,672 votes. He again became victorious in the 1965 polls with 19,989 votes over another doctor and incumbent governor Antonio Y. Mayuga, who only mustered 18,133 votes.<sup>24</sup>

In his entire twelve years in the Lower House, Joe was most productive during his last term (Sixth Congress, 1965-1969). Due to Speaker Jose B. Laurel Jr.'s trust in him, Joe was designated committee chair of health and vice chair of appropriations.<sup>25</sup> Because of these positions, Joe was dubbed the "guardian of national public health" during a publicized fish scare that was rooted in the dubious allegation that fish bought from public markets came from polluted sources. As a response, he initiated a congressional inquiry. After thorough laboratory tests, it was found that the rumors were false, thus ending the public scare and restoring public confidence in the national fishing industry (Rodriguez 1969, 18).

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23. Faustino F. Fabella, Jr., seventy years old, email interview by author from Canada, August 26, 2009.

24. Jovencio Ll. Mayor Jr., sixty-two years old, interview by author, Banaue, Quezon City, January 12, 2010.

25. Joe was responsible for the passage of the Philippine Midwifery Law, Philippine Nursing Law (amendments), Hospital Licensure Act, Geriatrics Center of the Philippines Act, National District Hospitals Act, and Medical Technology Act. Yet, his most valuable medical-related law was RA 6111 (Medicare Law). The said legislation provided for a comprehensive and coordinated (government and private) medical care program to be introduced gradually, preserving the insured freedom of choice of physician and hospital. In fact, this was considered one of the most successful bills passed by the Sixth Congress and he was acclaimed the "Father of Medicare." See Luceño (1969, 8-12) and Rodriguez (1969, 17-18).

Unlike Pensoy, Joe seemed to enjoy his legislative position and did not appear to harbor any plans for higher office. For his constituents, the latter enacted numerous laws that were more diverse than the former's. Joe prioritized the health of his own constituents by appropriating funds for the building and strengthening of local hospitals. These include the elevation of Tablas Emergency Hospital into Tablas General Hospital, the completion of Sibuyan Emergency District Hospital (construction started by Pensoy), and the building of two other hospitals. He also gave emphasis to the education sector: the creation of Alcantara National Trade School (ANTS) and Romblon School of Fisheries, the elevation of Looc High School to Looc National High School (LNHS), the elevation of Romblon National Agricultural School in Odiongan to a college, and the elevation of San Fernando High School to Romblon National Vocational School (RNVS). Likewise, he focused on creating new political units as an effective form of local empowerment. These include Barrio Lumbang Weste in Cajidiocan and Barangay Claro M. Recto in Odiongan (which later became part of Ferrol), and the municipalities of Isla de Carabao (created through RA 3423 enacted on June 18, 1961) and Calatrava (through RA 5317 on June 15, 1968) (Luceño 1969, 11).<sup>26</sup>

To continually attract and secure Romblomanons' affection and mandate, Joe expanded his brother's pet projects. He allocated funds for the improvement of Tugdan Airport's asphalt runway as well as the various circumferential roads on the three main islands of Romblon. Two more ports in Banton and Sta. Fe were added; the latter he called Fisherman's Small Craft Landing. He also approved the building of International Telephone & Telegraph (ITT) in Romblon capital town in order to improve the telephone connections to Manila and to let Romblomanons enjoy the luxury of owning television sets. He also fought for more funds for the communal irrigation systems in order to solve the problem of rice scarcity and the development of big waterworks projects through the Office of the Presidential Assistant on Community Development (PACD) and National Waterworks and Sewerage Authority (NAWASA) (Olingay 1969, 23; Jimenez 1969, 24).

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26. On June 16, 1965, the municipal district of Isla de Carabao was renamed San Jose through RA 4829. On June 23, 1969, San Jose and Calatrava were officially elevated as regular municipalities through Executive Order 184. Fulgencio S. Moreno, sixty-four years old, interview by author, Looc, Romblon, January 2, 2010.



Before his third term ended, Joe was shortlisted as one of the seventeen Top Performers-Achievers of the Sixth Congress, according to the *Congressional Researcher*, a bimonthly newspaper of the Lower House. In a citation, he was described as a very prolific lawmaker:

Very satisfactory legislator—Principal author of 17 national and 14 local bills passed into law, 3 local bills passed by both Houses but vetoed by the President, 27 national and 5 local bills passed by the House but pending approval by the Senate, 12 national and 25 local bills reported out by the Committee but pending for Second and Third Readings in the House; Sponsor of one adopted resolution, as of the end of the Eighth Special Session of the Sixth Congress. (Rodriguez 1969, 18)

It is interesting to note that the elections of 1953, 1957, and 1961 were testimonies of the guaranteed collective electoral victory of the Morenos in the position of congressman as long as the brothers supported each other. For three consecutive times, only one rival candidate posed a serious challenge to both of them; this was Jovencio Q. Mayor (1912–1993), a two-time governor of the province from Ferrol (then a barrio of Odiongan) endearingly called “Tata Joven.” He was a formidable contender because of two factors: first, he was always characterized as a charming and genial politician beloved by common voters; second, his wife Vicentica Cajilig Llorca (an older half-sister of Pensoy’s wife) belonged to an enormous and powerful clan whose members were common descendants of Don Miguel Llorca, a Spaniard family patriarch, and were scattered in various towns of Tablas such as Ferrol, Odiongan, Alcantara, and Santa Fe. Still, Pensoy won in a close fight against Joven in 1953 while Joe easily defeated Joven in 1957 and 1961.<sup>27</sup>

Moreno businesses such as TABTRANCO (founded by Tan Angki before 1949) and Tablas-Romblon Marble Corporation (also known as TROMCOR and independently owned by Pensoy) thrived side by side while the siblings remained in power. To strengthen the chances of his sons in winning elections, Tan Angki utilized TABTRANCO (including two sea barges) to provide free boarding passes to numerous voters from neighboring islands. Also, TABTRANCO provided free

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27. Jovencio Ll. Mayor Jr., sixty-two years old, interview by author, Banaue, Quezon City, January 12, 2010; Celina Ll. Ramo, seventy-two years old, interview by author, Looc, Romblon, October 29, 2016; and Lydia S. Llorca, eighty-three years old, interview by author, Odiongan, Romblon, November 3, 2017.



Figure 6. Dr. Jose Daniel "Joe" Moreno (seated, center), chief of Misamis Occidental Provincial Hospital, and the entire hospital staff and personnel. Photo courtesy of Chua family.

supply of crude oil to Pensoy's business whenever the latter was on the brink of bankruptcy.<sup>28</sup>

Out of his deep respect for and enormous debt of gratitude to his father, Pensoy initially gave in to the dynamics of *politica de familia*. In various cases, he consented to the favors asked by his father. For instance, DPWC gave TABTRANCO the exclusive contract of postal services (collecting and distributing ordinary mail and pier airmail) to the people of Tablas. At the time, the Bureau of Posts was under the direct management of DPWC and Pensoy had an office in its central building in Manila. Under this set-up, the TABTRANCO's manager, who is a brother-in-law, received his monthly salary from the government while another brother-in-law was appointed district engineer. Pensoy was also obliged to withdraw an action whenever it ran contrary to his father's wishes. Romblon's only provincial airport in Tugdan, Alcantara, is a case in point. He initially attempted to construct the airport in Bonbon (part of Doña Juana, San Agustin,) due to its suitable location. However, it did not push through, as his father, who owned vast lands in the area did not want to sell any of them to the government.<sup>29</sup>

Joe also supported the political decisions of his father. At first, he had no other political plans after his stint as an interim municipal mayor of Badajoz (1947-1948), but Tan Angki urged him to run and take Pensoy's place in 1957. Because of his father's persuasion, Joe had to quit his lucrative job as chief of the Misamis Occidental Provincial Hospital (1955-1957), subsequently ending his medical practice (figure 6). After getting elected, he immediately worked for the changing of the name of their municipality from Badajoz to San Agustin, much to the pride of his father. Aside from being younger than Pensoy, this more subservient attitude of Joe toward their father could have been the reason why the latter consistently sided with him, even during the 1969 elections. This partiality could be attested by the old man's preference to regularly stay in Joe's Guadalupe, Makati, residence while seeking medical attention.<sup>30</sup>

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28. Monica M. Hilario, seventy-seven years old, interview by author, San Agustin, Romblon, May 11, 2016.

29. Jaime M. Nepomuceno, sixty-four years old, interview by author, San Agustin, Romblon, May 27, 2009; and Monica M. Hilario, seventy-seven years old, interview by author, San Agustin, Romblon, May 11, 2016.

30. Monica M. Hilario, seventy-seven years old, interview by author, San Agustin, Romblon, May 11, 2016; and Erlinda M. Chua, sixty-one years old, interview by author, Don Antonio Heights, Quezon City, May 27, 2016.

## THE 1969 ELECTIONS

In the 1969 elections, Joe decided to run for his fourth term, a record rivaling Festin's. It was crucial because: (1) it would have been his last term, and (2) being in public office was his only means of livelihood since he gave up his medical practice.<sup>31</sup> He was harshly criticized by his political enemies as inutile and had overstayed in power. In his defense, journalist Fernando Mar Rodriguez wrote:

To go back to Rep. Moreno, his political opponents who claim that he has not done anything for the Province of Romblon do not need to go far. All they have to do is to look at the lives of the people themselves. Has Rep. Moreno done things to alleviate their plight from which they used to languish before? Has Rep. Moreno been instrumental in raising the per capita income of the average Romblomanons? Was Rep. Moreno directly instrumental in the establishment of basic projects now being utilized by our people? And finally, was Rep. Moreno an outstanding solon in point of legislative work? If the answer to these questions is yes, then he deserves your continued support and mandate. (Rodriguez 1969, 31)

This time, Joe's reelection campaign was hanging by a thread, since the rival candidate from LP was considered a more formidable opponent than Mayor. In close reading, Esteban S. Madrona (1927–2004) had several factors to outmaneuver the incumbent. First, he was a former war hero like Joe who gallantly participated in the liberation of Romblon. Second, he was a career civil engineer who previously worked closely with Pensoy under the DPWC. Third, he was a townmate of Joe who also belonged to a prominent family in San Agustin. Fourth, he was a nephew of Manuel L. Solidum, a former mayor of Alcantara and a two-time governor of Romblon (elected for the third time in 1971). In fact, he and Joe's wife were first cousins. Fifth, he was able to utilize his kinship ties (through his wife) in Asi-speaking towns such as Banton and Odiongan. At the time, younger people from those towns were becoming increasingly outspoken against the continuing dominance of the Moreno dynasty in Romblon (Famatigan 2003, 100–01).<sup>32</sup>

31. Erlinda M. Chua, sixty-one years old, interview by author, Don Antonio Heights, Quezon City, May 27, 2016.

32. Esteban Madrona's term with the declaration of martial law in 1972. He tried to revive his political career in 1984 but failed. His son, Eleandro Jesus F. Madrona, was elected in 1992 and has won seven elections since then (congressman from 1992 to 2001, 2007 to 2016, and governor from 2001 to 2004). Last May 2019, he again succeeded his younger brother, Emmanuel F. Madrona, as congressman. Mario G. Fradejas, Jr., seventy-nine years old, interview by author, Odiongan, Romblon, January 30, 2010.

The situation became more intense when the rivalry between the two Moreno siblings became public. Earlier that year, Pensoy had already been vocal about returning to his previous position as congressman while his own son, Miguel Ll. Moreno, was the incumbent vice governor of Romblon. To Pensoy's great disappointment, Tan Angki sided with Joe in his reelection bid and pleaded with Pensoy to wait another term. Allegedly urged by his wife and children, Pensoy insisted on running again by invoking seniority in the family (as *manong* or oldest among the brothers). Feeling disobeyed, the father used emotional intervention until Pensoy was forced to withdraw his candidacy a day before the elections. Due to confusion and the public display of disunity, many ballots were declared invalid while a substantial number of voters opted to elect Madrona as the new leader. Furthermore, gossip quickly spread among the constituents that Pensoy himself secretly campaigned against his own brother by siding with Madrona.<sup>33</sup>

Why did Pensoy attempt to run against his own brother? It must be noted that Pensoy had greater dreams to be a senator but twice failed to be shortlisted by the NP. In 1961, he was unable to get a spot when the party leaders pointed out that he came from a peripheral province with a small voting population. In 1965, a former house colleague tried to help him secure a slot from President Marcos in exchange for bribe money, a move that he blatantly turned down out of pride.<sup>34</sup> Having no other way to recapture power, Pensoy sought for his former political position, held at the time by his successor, his younger brother Joe.

Pensoy's action to defy their father and go against his own brother could be explained by how politicians behaved at the time. Based from K. G. Machado's (1974) study, a new political class emerged after the grant of Philippine Independence in 1946 and was characterized to have entered politics through more specialized channels later in their lives. Also, its members were more likely to make political choices that

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33. According to Peter Montojo, he was about to deliver a nomination speech for Joe's reelection in the 1969 NP Romblon convention when Pensoy unexpectedly stood up in the midst of local leaders and uttered these words: "A merchandise of inferior quality has to be overadvertised to make it saleable." Jaime M. Nepomuceno, sixty-four years old, interview by author, San Agustin, Romblon, May 27, 2009; Erlinda M. Chua, sixty-one years old, interview by author, Don Antonio Heights, Quezon City, May 27, 2016; and Monica M. Hilario, seventy-seven years old, interview by author, San Agustin, Romblon, May 11, 2016.

34. Monica M. Hilario, seventy-seven years old, interview by author, San Agustin, Romblon, May 11, 2016.

would eventually lead to the breakdown of traditional local factions and their replacement by more specialized political and electoral organizations. If necessary, they could violate the rules of traditional factional politics and could make independent political decisions, a postwar leadership trend that could have led to a more viable party system in the Philippines if martial law was not declared in 1972 (119–23). By following Machado's observations, it seemed that Pensoy was able to transform into a professional politician, to the disappointment of his clan, while Joe remained within the entanglements of *politica de familia*.

Indeed, the sibling rivalry was so devastating to the Moreno dynasty that it shattered not only their formerly united political base but also jeopardized their family businesses. On the political side, the family never regained the same positions it held for two decades. Joe was so ashamed of his defeat that he did not run again.<sup>35</sup> He also lost the electoral protest about the invalid votes, which he filed and was largely funded by a US-based daughter. On the economic side, TABTRANCO was not able to regain its former popularity and dynamism. In fact, it was already showing signs of bankruptcy before 1969, as the jeepney (popularized by Leonardo Sarao in 1953) had already been introduced as a cheaper mode of transportation. Apparent mismanagement among family members further led to the external flow of funds. As a result, the political downfall of the Morenos in 1969 eventually led to the closure of TABTRANCO in 1976.<sup>36</sup>

The 1969 elections did not only end the Moreno era in local politics but also marked the decline of the political rule of the Romblomanon-speaking leaders and the rise of Unhan-speaking leaders such as Governor Solidum and Assemblyman Nemesio V. Ganan Jr. Furthermore, the succeeding local elections showed the change of dominance from NP to LP. In 1967, most occupants of provincial positions, including eleven out of fourteen municipal mayors, were affiliated with the Morenos' party (Commission on Elections 1969,

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35. In 1984, Felices Moreno, the youngest brother among the siblings, ran but narrowly lost the gubernatorial post to Governor Solidum. His camp was prematurely celebrating his perceived victory on the night of the elections but, the next day, the ballots were stolen and the provincial capitol building was burned, allegedly by his opponent's camp.

36. Monica M. Hilario, seventy-seven years old, interview by author, San Agustin, Romblon, May 11, 2016; and Erlinda M. Chua, sixty-one years old, interview by author, Don Antonio Heights, Quezon City, May 27, 2016.

249, 456-58), but in 1971, only five out of fifteen municipal mayors were part of NP while the rest of the posts all belonged to LP, then the opposition party to President Marcos (Commission on Elections 1973, 391, 628-30).

The 1971 elections for Constitutional Convention delegates could effectively testify to the weakening state of the Moreno dynasty when Pensoy launched his political comeback but only ranked third in a field of many candidates. It was concrete proof of his declining popularity among the electorate more than two decades after he was first elected. The two winners were Manuel F. Martinez and Ernesto G. Ang, both members of the younger generation who represented exact opposites of the ruling political family and offered fresh hopes and idealism for the people of Romblon. Pensoy filed an electoral protest against Ang for his citizenship, but the court ultimately favored the neophyte.<sup>37</sup>

The declaration of martial law in 1972 further frustrated the recovery plans of the Morenos. The era of the Marcos dictatorship was a dark period for the siblings. On the one hand, most of Pensoy's ideas in public works, such as hydroelectric power plants, were largely exploited by the Marcos regime without appointing him to any government position. This could have been a result of Pensoy's strained relationship with Marcos when they were still colleagues in Congress in 1949.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, Dr. Pacifico E. Marcos, the dictator's younger brother, falsely took sole credit for sponsoring the Medicare Act. This move deeply hurt Joe, who, as a former congressman, did much from its initial development to full enactment. It must be noted that Joe spent some time in Mexico in order to study the whole idea of the said legislation.<sup>39</sup>

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37. Ernesto G. Ang, sixty-nine years old, interview by author, Odiongan, Romblon, May 29, 2009.

38. Family members repeatedly narrate that Pensoy used to bully the young Marcos while they were colleagues in the Lower House. Though they were both prewar UP graduates, the former was almost ten years older than the latter. Since Pensoy was an engineer-turned-congressman and not a lawyer like Marcos, it became his lifetime goal to finish his law studies. In fact, he was still taking up law subjects when he served as dean of the University of the East's College of Engineering in the 1970s.

39. Monica M. Hilario, seventy-seven years old, interview by author, San Agustin, Romblon, May 11, 2016; and Erlinda M. Chua, sixty-one years old, interview by author, Don Antonio Heights, Quezon City, May 27, 2016.



Figure 7. Rep. Jose Daniel "Joe" Moreno with wife Luz and their seven children. Photo courtesy of Chua family.



Pensoy Moreno married Rosario Soliven Llorca in 1936. Their union produced eleven children: Miguel, Juanito, Florencio Jr., Gil, Arturo, Rosalor (West), Eduardo, Fidela, Rosario (Battung), Victor, and Roberto Glen. After Pensoy's death, some of his children successfully engaged in municipal and provincial politics. However, none among them surpassed the political record of their late father.<sup>40</sup>

Joe Moreno married Luz Madrona Dalida of Alcantara in 1940. Their marriage produced seven children: Ellen, Roland, Jose Daniel Jr., Louella, Edmond, Erlinda (Chua), and Maria Christine (Madamba) (figure 7). One son attempted to enter politics like his father but lost (Chua 2016).<sup>41</sup>

After the death of Tan Angki in 1975, the relationship between the Moreno brothers worsened. Though they were socially civil to each other, they did not fully reconcile; instead, they traversed separate paths until their retirement. Pensoy spent his remaining years teaching engineering courses in various universities in Manila and Baguio. He died on June 19, 1982, at the age of seventy-four and was buried in the family mausoleum in Manila North Cemetery. Joe, meanwhile, went back to America, where he spent his retirement years together with his wife and children. He died on February 16, 2000, at the age of eighty-four and was buried in a privately owned cemetery in San Agustin, Romblon.<sup>42</sup>

In Montesa's view, the Moreno brothers deserve recognition and remembrance from their constituents as men of hard work and integrity:

From these points of view and my personal perception, I consider then Congressmen Florencio Moreno and Jose D. Moreno (brothers) as great politicians and good public servants. With meager resources (government funds) during their incumbencies, they accomplished much in this province. The accomplishments of both are too many to mention. Both were honest and dedicated in the performance of their positions. They did not enrich themselves while in office. Both were not involved in any anomaly, or graft and corruption. They died poor, unhonored, and unsung.<sup>43</sup>

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40. Gil Ll. Moreno, sixty-seven years old, interview by author, San Agustin, Romblon, October 23, 2008.

41. Erlinda M. Chua, sixty-one years old, interview by author, Don Antonio Heights, Quezon City, May 27, 2016.

42. Gil Ll. Moreno, sixty-seven years old, interview by author, San Agustin, Romblon, October 23, 2008; and Erlinda M. Chua, sixty-one years old, interview by author, in Don Antonio Heights, Quezon City, on May 27, 2016.

43. Abundio M. Montesa Jr. seventy-seven years old, interview by author, San Agustin, Romblon, October 22, 2008.

## CONCLUSION

The rise of the Moreno siblings to power was largely shaped by their adherence to three Western values: Catholicism, professionalism, and nationalism. Equipped with vast experience from their individual careers, they were highly regarded by Romblomanons as two capable leaders who could properly represent their lone district at the national level. However, the key to the family's survival in local politics required *politica de familia*. Thus, the siblings reluctantly gave in to the demands and pressures from the family patriarch. Due to internal (clash between the father and Pensoy for family leadership) and external factors (change in national leadership), the Morenos succumbed to an inevitable rivalry between Pensoy and Joe. As a result, the family suffered political defeat in the 1969 elections, which eventually led to the decline of their economic interests.

As already stated, the Moreno brothers both belonged to the promising breed of Philippine postwar professional politicians who supported each other while holding individual political offices and sustaining their family's businesses. Though they had the potential to further contribute to national leadership, limited features of their home province not only thwarted their plans for political expansion but turned them into political enemies. Ultimately, the downfall of Pensoy and Joe from politics led to the family's economic decline, as the imposition of authoritarian rule prevented them to recover.

As siblings, Pensoy and Joe had many things in common. Aside from being relatives by blood, they were both UP-educated and members of a Filipino generation trained under an American system of education. Also, they both performed patriotic service during wartime according to their respective professions. Moreover, they were in their prime years when they ran for public office. Both were forty-two years old when they served their first terms as congressmen. Furthermore, both of them brought pride of place and social services, beneficial for the well-being of the Romblomanons in general.

This study of a Romblon-based political dynasty attempts to contribute to the growing discourse on the Philippine provincial elite, with special focus on the postwar period from 1946 to 1972. Aside from Machado's 1972 study, there are other classic studies that discussed this era. Enriched with political theories, Hollnsteiner (1963) and Free (1960) both offer further insight on the electoral processes at the time. Still, the case of the Moreno brothers gives additional perspectives, as both were professional politicians who

engaged in a feud within the family, a new and interesting angle for political scientists to explore.

However, there is much to be done to cover other archipelagic provinces with limited populations and are geographically isolated from the center, such as Batanes, Biliran, Camiguin, Catanduanes, Dinagat Island, Guimaras, Marinduque, Masbate, Palawan, Siquijor, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi. ❀

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