

LIFE STORIES OF WOMEN POLITICAL LEADERS
IN MINDANAO: PATHWAYS TO POWER
AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO
WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

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Abstract

The count of political posts occupied by women in the Republic has remained marginal in contrast to the number of seats filled-in by men (Tancangco, 2001). Although growing in number, there is still a need to increase women's participation as public officials as imagined and advocated by RA9710, the Magna Carta of Women. In Mindanao, for instance, it is important to acknowledge that women grew in power from 11.5% to 28.8% in the last 25 years (MindaNews, 2013). This statistical improvement, however, needs careful scrutiny as many of these officials entered the political scene as wives, daughters, sisters or widows of men elected officials (MindaNews, 2013). While this observation articulates the supposed less than ideal pathways of women into the world of politics, the stories and reflections of these women and other women politicians who do not belong to such traditional entry points remain wanting of critical interest and attention. By conducting key informant interviews with four women politicians in the Dinagat Islands, Mindanao, their stories on how they became politicians in the province shed light on unique circumstances and principles that brought them to their current political positions, and their struggles in inspiring more women to figure in the political landscape of the province. Guided by the life story approach, this study – with its key informant interviews, field visits and analysis conducted between June to December 2016 – holds that the women politicians in the Dinagat Islands who entered the political scene with their ideologies of social justice and principles of commitment, honesty, and transparency continue to keep such principles as their guide posts in gradually counteracting a political culture in the province and prefer service over power for those at the margins.

Keywords: benchwarmer phenomenon, women politicians, life story, Dinagat Islands, Mindanao

INTRODUCTION

THE STRUGGLE FOR PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN in the political arena remains a vital and strategic women's agenda (PCW, 2016). Conditioned by a political landscape that still commands male dominance, the posts and positions that women politicians occupy are still regulated by ideals, expectations and structures that make women's pathways to power more challenging than their male counterparts. A specific bias that goes against the capacities of women leaders is couched within the frame of the benchwarmer phenomenon (Coronel, Chua, et al, 2004). This label suggests that women enter politics primarily as a seat warmer functioning as a warm body that waits until the male member of the family or party is legally allowed to run for another term of office. As this line of thinking conversely puts more expectations on women's pathways to political power, the label simultaneously reinforces the dichotomy between the standards placed on the shoulders of women and the less than ideal parameters placed on male politicians (Sobritchea, lecture notes in 2015). This is a sample of an uncritical and habitual appraisal in the way society consolidates its standards of women in politics, and its inclination to disregard lofty expectations from the male politicians.

With the undue bias against women politicians, the Philippines is, however, not without its exemplar women politicians who choose to confront and challenge the double standard, and decided to carve new ways of framing the woman politician. In the province of the Dinagat Islands, this research has provided a space for the life stories of four women politicians whose stories, principles, projects and decisions dispose the possible elements that can characterize the counterfactuals to the benchwarmer phenomenon. What makes a women politician a counterfactual to the benchwarmer phenomenon? Are there disposing factors the enabled these women politicians to commit to the task of altering the way individuals and communities regard the role and function of women in the government? These are two of the pressing questions that this study seeks to address and appraise. In desiring to understand what these questions mean or possibly stand for, this project hopes to contribute in the country's quest for transformative situations that will motivate more women to rise to the top, influence decision-making process that will build capacitated societies, and break the conventional stereotype that leadership roles – such as politics, is not a women's world (PCW, 2016).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Aiming to determine how women politicians become elected into government posts, and the possibility of counterfactuals to the benchwarmer phenomenon, this research looks into the inclusion process that condition women's political participation as elected officials in the Dinagat Islands, Mindanao. Guided by such interest, this life story research tackles these interrelated points: (a) the role and influence of the family in running for a political office, (b) the political machineries usually employed or invoked that dispose a candidate's chance to win an elected post, and (c) the emerging challenges or constraints to a woman's candidacy, and political participation as government elected official. From these considerations, the problem statement is divided into the following research questions framed according to the life history approach of Cole and Knowles (2001):

- (1) What factors encourage and/or discourage women to contend for political positions?
- (2) How do women vying for such positions build on enabling mechanisms and deal with possible constraints?
- (3) How do women politicians view themselves in relation to their male counterparts?
- (4) What are the issues of women in Dinagat Islands? How do women politicians address such issues and other emerging concerns?
- (5) What possible action plan or mechanism will help increase the number of women politicians in the Dinagat Islands?
- (6) Are these women politicians counterfactuals to the benchwarmer phenomenon?

SCOPE AND LIMITATION

Given certain geographical and time constraints, this study centers on the life stories of four women elected officials in the province of the Dinagat Islands, Mindanao. Initial inventory of women politicians in Mindanao led the researchers to interesting and unique narratives of women officials in the province who won government posts through non-patronage advocacies and critical political platforms. The stories suggest that these women officials collectively decided to oppose patronage politics and move past transactional habits of traditional political dynasties. Such accounts consequently motivated the researchers to qualitatively document, describe and discuss the life stories of the select women politicians in order to reconstruct unique pathways to political power, identify possible

contributions to women, gender and development agenda in the province, and inquire if their brand of politics stands as critique to, or still falls within the benchwarmer phenomenon.

With regard to approach, the privileged method of this study is the life-history approach of Cole and Knowles (2001). The analytical and discursive part is enabled by the perspective of Foucault, which is specifically hinged on his notions on discontinuity (1967) and technologies of the self (1988). These philosophical and analytical concepts help dispose and unpack the meanings of the informants' initiatives and struggles to reconfigure in traditional and marginalizing spaces in the seemingly persistent backward political landscape in the province.

RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW

Women's Political Participation. Participation is a crucial component in development and governance discourse. People's participation, for instance, is now considered necessary in inclusive development which underscores the necessity to provide ways and spaces where people can contribute in decision making processes (Agarwal, 2001). Following Agarwal's classification, participation can be further categorized as either one or a combination of these types: (1) nominal participation, (2) passive participation, (3) consultative participation, (4) activity-specific participation, (5) active participation, and (6) interactive or empowering participation. Guided by this list, this paper primarily makes use of the contrast between passive participation which is limited to attendance and listening in decision-making without speaking up, and interactive or empowering participation which is characterized by 'having a voice and influence in the group's decision' (Agarwal, 2001). These are the key types of participation used in describing and analyzing women's participation in politics in general and in Dinagat Islands in particular.

Between passive and empowering forms of participation, White (1996) proposes that it is the latter type of participation that is needed to transform women's contribution in the landscape of political decisions. White, on this note, holds that women empowerment in politics implies having the ability to make decisions and take actions, which in turn build confidence and capabilities that motivate women to have a voice and influence processes in making decisions in the arena of politics. This is reiterated in Lamprianou (2013) who specifies that an obvious pathway for women to having more voice or influence in decision-making is making their presence felt in political activities, and in Hague and Harrop's (1987) point of view noting the formal intent to determine or influence those who

govern and the manner of their governance.

In understanding women's political participation, Hague and Harrop's (1987) distinction between two modes or types of involvement in politics as orthodox and unorthodox is also important to consider. This classification explains that the former is limited to the electoral process, while the latter takes new or creative forms of expression such as rallies, strikes, boycotts and similar other alternative forms that are usually caused by disenchantment within the existing political structures. In relation to women's political participation, unorthodox and orthodox involvement may include joining political organizations; organizing, lobbying, and protesting; voting and campaigning for their chosen candidate; filing their own candidacy and becoming candidates themselves; getting elected and assuming positions in the government. In the Philippines, Aguilar (1990) and Tancangco (1990) identified women's political participation as follows: voting, campaigning, and running for elective post, Cabinet appointment and involvement in the women's movement which somehow lean towards the orthodox position. This leaning may also be conditioned by the recent increase of women leaders who ran and are elected into office.

A peculiar feature of such increase, however, needs scrutiny, since data will also show that most of these women come from dynastic family that serve as "breakers" which means "they break their husband's, father's, or brother's term of office" (Tapales, 2002 in Sobritchea, in press) or "benchwarmers" which means women may be place holders for relatives awaiting their turn to run for office because they have reached their term limits. (Coronel, Chua, et al, 2004). The concept of a benchwarmer, as a gender construct, may also traced back to Irene Diamond's *Sex Roles in the State House* (1977) where she referred to a female legislator who was so unhappy in taking over a departing representative's seat as "housewife-benchwarmer." The term, on such note, maintains the premise that these wives of politicians are not really serious in political work themselves and have no ambitions in making a career in politics. What these women politicians seek to accomplish is to warming the bench for a returning male relative to run and win that same seat in the next election.

Women's Political Representation. Hanna Pitkin (1967) divides representation into four types: (1) *authorized*, where a representative is legally empowered to act for another; (2) *descriptive*, where the representative stands for a group by virtue of sharing similar characteristics such as race, sex, ethnicity, or residence; (3) *symbolic*, where a leader stands for national ideas; and (4) *substantive*, where the representative seeks to advance a group's policy preferences and interests (as cited in Childs & Lovenduski, 2012). With these forms of representation, Pitkin observes that descriptive

representation does not automatically result in substantive representation. In the case of women representation, the disjunction between descriptive and substantive representation means that having more political seats occupied by women does not guarantee having more development agenda for women's issues and concerns. As Sumbadze (2008) maintains, descriptive representation only increases the likelihood for considering women's issues as well as bringing in the gender perspective. However, such type representation on its own cannot guarantee the completion of desired or targeted outcomes such as laws and ordinances that favor the interests of women (as cited in Blomgren, 2010).

Despite its limitations, descriptive representation of women in politics is still valued as it has the potential in advancing women's issues and interests as compared to having no representation at all. This is supported by the '*Theory of the Politics of Presence*,' which suggests that female politicians are still best equipped to represent the interests and issues of women (Phillips, 1995, as cited in Coffe 2012, p 287). As Wangnerud (2009) adds, the count remains important, since woman politicians are seen to best represent their fellow women's interests because they share their experience and may not be adequately addressed by male politicians (as cited in Coffee 2012).

In studies on women's political participation, descriptive and substantive types of representations have been studied especially in European and American contexts. Early attempts in studying such phenomena looked at increasing numbers of women politicians across the world, and describing the presence of these women in the parliament, cabinet, or bureaucracy. It is only recently, however, that studies on women's political participation investigated the impacts of the presence of these woman leaders on policies and programs in relation to the advancement of women's interest. This is the same interest, which this study aims to look at by focusing on the substantive representation of identified woman politicians in Dinagat Islands through their contributions in addressing women's issues in the province.

Women's Political Representation in the Philippines. Statistical studies on the distribution of women politicians in the country have shown that women's representation is low. The often-cited cause of such low rate of representation is traced back to the male-centric nature of Philippine politics. Although women's participation in electoral politics has recently improved, the wide gap in participation rates between men and women remains (Sobritchea, 2014; Alvarez, 2015; Valente & Moreno, 2014).

The statistical records of the COMELEC (2015), for instance, show very minimal gradual increase of female candidates and elected

officials over the years and the percentage difference between male and female candidates and elected officials remains wide (See Appendix 2). In the last 2016 Presidential election, COMELEC data also showed that only 19% or 8,873 of the candidates who ran for elective posts were women and 80% (See Appendix 3) or 36,904 were men and the remaining 1% were nominees for party-list groups. (Inquirer.net, 15 September 2016). Another statistical data of the COMLEC demonstrates that in all elective positions, women candidates are below the thirty percent (30%), which is usually the percentage goal for gender quotas (See Appendix 4).

The low participation of women in the political arena according to Sobritchea (in press) can be attributed to various cultural, political, and economic factors that prevent women to a full and meaningful participation. These factors make it more difficult to penetrate the sphere of politics that has always been male dominated. This particular difficulty and impenetrability has been likened to a “glass ceiling” effect, broadly discussed in many studies such as the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission Zeng (2014) wherein the term glass ceiling refers to the ‘unseen, yet unbreachable barrier that keeps minority and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualification or achievement and now applies to obstacles hindering the advancement of women’ (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995ab, as cited in Zeng, 2014).

Glass Ceiling Phenomenon. ‘The concept of the glass ceiling represents a specific pattern of career disadvantages that can explain the lack of women and minorities at top positions’ (Baxter and Wright 2000a, 2000b; Cotter 2001; Federal Glass Ceiling Commission 1995; Ferec and Purkayastha 2000; Martin 1991, all cited in Folke & Rickne, 2014). Two features of this concept need to be looked into: (1) barriers to women’s or racial minorities’ career advancement exist because of their sex or minority status, and (2) discriminatory barriers grow thicker for positions that are higher up in the organizational hierarchy. If the disadvantages are more severe at the lower levels, this is not consistent with a glass ceiling but rather with a “sticky floor.” (Folke & Rickne, 2014). Thus, women intending to enter politics are more likely to hurdle tougher and maybe an entirely different path that of their male counterpart towards winning an election mainly because of their sex. Once they win a seat, then we say they have broken or shattered that glass ceiling.

Studies have also identified barriers or obstacles preventing women from breaking that glass ceiling. These obstacles can be categorized into three areas: (1) political/institutional; (2) socio-economic; and (3) ideological and psychological (or socio-cultural). (Shvedova, 2005) for

political/institutional constraints, it includes: (a) masculine model of politics, (b) lack of part support, (c) lack of cooperation with women's organizations, (d) lack of access to well-developed education and training systems for women's leadership, and (e) nature of electoral system may or may not be favorable to women candidates. For socio-economic constraints, it may pertain to: (a) feminization of poverty and unemployment/ or lack of adequate financial resources, (b) illiteracy and limited access to education and choice of professions, and (c) the dual burden of domestic tasks and professions. And for the ideological-psychological hurdles, it can stand for: (a) gender ideology, cultural patterns and predetermined social roles assigned to women and men, (b) women's lack of confidence to stand for election, (c) women's perception of politics as dirty, and (d) portrayal of women in mass media that perpetuate gender biases and stereotypes.

In the Philippines, the masculine model of politics or the male-centered political culture is — the traditional brand of politics that has been popularly described as dominated by *goons, guns, and gold*. Campaign funds are allegedly raised through gambling, prostitution, and trading of prohibited drugs or sourced out from businessman in exchange for future favors. (Sobritchea, in press, p. 17). Male dominance in politics is critical in preventing Filipino women from attaining full equality with their men and insures monopoly of men's control over spheres of decision-making (Tancangco, 1990, p. 357).

Sobritchea's (in press) and Santos-Maranan, Parreño, and Fabros' (2007) studies on full and meaningful political participation of Filipino women resulted in similar barriers or hindering factors identified by Shvedova. For the political-institutional domain, the constraints stand for: (a) persistent sexist beliefs and practices in private and public spheres and a male-centered macho political culture, (b) male leaders as key decision maker in political dynasties and political parties, (c) gender insensitive female politicians, (d) increasing female representation in public leadership may not directly promote women's concerns; the need to sensitive women leaders to support pro-women policies and programs, (e) lack of support for potential and incumbent female leaders both from political parties and female electorate, (f) divergent views and standpoints of women's groups, (g) Pernicious influence of faith-based groups on state governance, and (h) the real and imagined differences and tensions within and among women's groups and other organizations. For the socio-economic constraints, the reasons cover: (a) running for public office is expensive and entails wide network and connection, and (b) child and family care is still regarded as women's more important contribution to society. Lastly, for the ideological-psychological constraints, these conditions impede the

possibility of increased women political representation: (a) stereotypes & sexism - women being too emotional, indecisive, physically weak to assume responsible government positions, incompetent, (b) gender-role stereotyping of congressional duties, (c) lack of skills and motivation to assume leadership roles, and (d) double standards – participatory and consultative leadership style of President Corazon Aquino was taken as a sign of weakness and “feminine” incompetence. However, when male leaders adopted the same leadership style, they were praised for sensitivity to democratic principles.

Quest for Better Participation and Representation. While challenges remain in achieving women’s meaningful and full political participation, significant strides have also been made to constantly push for reforms thus making it possible for women to challenge the male dominated political space and assert themselves. These include international declarations and legal instruments that have contributed in pressuring state parties, like the Philippines, in pushing for increased women’s political participation and representation. Right of women to participate in political decision-making is recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 under Articles 2 and 21 and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Article 25 (See Appendix 5).

This was followed by the adoption of the Convention on the Political Rights of Women by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 1952 and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979, affirming the obligation of State Parties to take affirmative action in increasing women’s participation and representation in political activities. The Philippine government in turn is mandated to fulfill its obligation as signatories and parties to these Conventions and Declarations. Even without these obligations, our own 1987 Philippine Constitution guarantees the same right as provided in Section 26, Article II, granting equal access to opportunities for public service.

A strong legal framework and women’s movement also paved the way for the legislation of other laws that ensure and enhance participation of women such as, RA 7192 or the Women in Development and Nation-Building Act of 1992 and RA 7160: An Act Providing for a Local Government Code of 1991. RA 7160 mandates local government units to elect a representative from the women sector to be part of the local legislative council. In addition, Republic Act 9710 or the Magna Carta of Women provides for the “acceleration of women’s participation and equitable representation in decision-making and policy-making processes in government and private entities to fully realize their role as agents and beneficiaries of development.”

As early as 1995, the country also has a national machinery for the advancement of women with the establishment of the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW), now known as the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW). PCW's mandate is to "to review, evaluate, and recommend measures, including priorities to ensure the full integration of women for economic, social and cultural development at national, regional and international levels, and to ensure further equality between women and men." PCW is also instrumental in drafting the Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development (PPGD 1995-2025) to address gender inequality, including the realm of politics and governance.

The basic goal for political empowerment as indicated in the PPGD Framework is the empowerment of women through their full participation in political processes and structures. The framework also stressed the importance of letting women exercise their political rights and determining laws and policies not limited to traditional concerns of women but also those associated with men such as peace, energy, power, infrastructure, etc. Full participation is dependent on women's access to literacy, information, and education. Government is also called upon to engage in affirmative action programs such as women's representation in all branches of government and strengthening women's organizations. The framework noted the crucial role of voters' education and the creation of women's vote in achieving gender equality.

Despite these legal frames, political parties in the country are still mostly led by men and fielding of candidates is generally decided by men. The passage of the Gender Balance Bill that provides for a gender quota and women's agenda inclusion in campaign platform is yet to be realized. This will not entirely address the causes of under-representation of women in politics and governance, 'but targets one major problem — political parties' selection of males as their candidates for election to a much larger extent, over women because of their own prejudice or in anticipation of voters' prejudice. Gender quotas in a way represent a jump over historical barriers to equality. They give the voters the option to choose women candidates, which they may not have had before [within their preferred party].' (Dahlerup, 2005, p18).

Why Push for Women's Representation? The need to push for women's representation in the political arena is supported by three (3) arguments (Lovenduski, 2000, as cited in Blomgren 2010). These are justice arguments, pragmatic arguments, and difference arguments. *Justice argument*, the most powerful of the three, claims that, 'it is simply unfair for men to monopolize representation, especially in a country that considered

itself a modern democracy' (Lovenduski, 2005, p22). This argument is supported by the citizenship claim that women have the same right as men, in this case to run for office, in a democratic system. The *pragmatic argument* is simply vote maximization and that political parties fielding more women candidates are more attractive to women voters (Lovenduski, 2005). Lastly, the *difference argument* furthers two important features — 'that women will bring different style and approach to politics than men and that women are a heterogeneous group who require equal descriptive representation if their diversity is to be reflected in decision making.' (Childs & Lovenduski, 2012)

In the Philippines, the difference argument still needs to be looked into given the limited studies available on Filipino women politicians. This study will try to look into this by assessing women politicians' view of themselves in relation to their male counterparts. Meanwhile, the pragmatic argument in pushing for more female representation does not hold water. Despite the fact that in the last 2016 Presidential election, Commission on Election (COMELEC) data showed that there were more female voters (28,052,138 or 51.6%) than male voters (26,311,706 or 48.4%), survey experts and studies have shown that there is no existence of women's vote in the country (Tapales, 1992; Veneracion-Rallonza, 2008). The fact that women make up more than half of the electorate does not necessarily mean female candidates have more chances of winning. In 1937, 447,725 women voters came out to vote on the plebiscite issue of women's suffrage and this number increased to 10,768,881 in the January 1988 elections. (Tancangco, 1990) The sheer number of women's voters is powerful enough to put women candidates in office but unfortunately Filipino women do not capitalize on this (Tancangco, 1990). It is shown in the Commission on Election (COMELEC) data that only about 20% of elected posts are occupied by women. The non-existence of women's vote in the country can be attributed to macho culture, wherein men are believed to be superior to women and the public (for men) and private (for women) divide thus politics is a man's world (Tancangco, 1990).

Lastly, studies have also been conducted by Filipino feminist scholars citing the Philippine Constitution and other human rights instruments in pushing for increased women's representation, which fits the justice argument. It is also being invoked as present generation of women advocates push for the institutionalization of gender quota because despite the increasing number of woman politicians getting elected, it remains to be less than the *critical mass*. Critical mass is the idea that there are a certain number of woman politicians to enable them to actually make a difference. (Dahlerup, 1988, as cited in Blomgren, 2010).

By situating women's political participation in the above-mentioned typology, definitions, and modes, this study will focus on the orthodox mode of political participation of women leaders in Dinagat Islands in Mindanao who have accomplished breaking the glass ceiling in a male centric political landscape. It will mainly look at those who have decided to run for office, campaigned, and got elected in the province, particularly the emergence of female leaders who are not dynastic and are not benchwarmers that run counterfactual to the existing trend. These accomplishments shall be gleaned through their life stories and contributions to the development agenda of women in the province.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The discursive lens for the analysis of the generated stories is provided by Foucault's interrelated concepts of discontinuity and technologies of the self. In *Archaeology of Human Knowledge* (1967), Foucault makes a distinction between two types of history: one that is concerned about unities and linear successions, and another, which places its interest on breaks, discoveries and initiatives. Between these approaches to historical thinking, Foucault's idea of discontinuity understood as breaks, discoveries and initiatives can help theoretically locate the women politicians in the Dinagat Islands who continue to distinguish themselves from the traditional-patronage brand of politics. The other concept – technologies of the self, in *Technologies of the Self* is where Foucault (1988) discusses the multi-angled agency of an individual as she/he is in the midst of power relations. This is conceptually where the person transforms herself/himself in order to attain certain states of satisfaction, justice, or happiness. In relation to the narratives of women politicians in the Dinagat Islands, Foucault's concept shall help tease out and piece together transformative aspects that the non-traditional women politicians cultivate in order to introduce a new brand of leadership aiming to dismantle the trappings of traditional modern-day patronage politics. Foucault's concepts of discontinuity and technologies of the self, therefore, en-frame the liberative and inspiring aspects of the narratives of women politicians, and theoretically locate their contributions to community building as instances of breaks, innovation, and agency. These theoretical perspectives of Foucault also allow this paper to examine three interrelated concerns with regard to women's political representation: (a) glass ceiling phenomenon, (b) benchwarmer phenomenon, and (c) women's symbolic and substantive representation in the realm of politics.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Cole and Knowles (2001) define a life story or life narrative as an outcome of the interaction between the account of the informant and the questions and reflections of the interviewer or researcher. The dialogical process means that a life story is neither entirely reprieved of the researcher's individuality nor is it an exclusive tale or account of the person interviewed (Ibid.) This means that a life story is construed as a result of the researcher's and informant's committed participation and contribution. To arrive at meaningful texts in a life story research, Cole and Knowles (2001) also specifies these processual features that form the dignity of life histories: (a) relationality, (b) mutuality, (c) empathy, and (d) care, sensitivity, and respect.

With relationality, the researcher is invited to create or cultivate personal or professional relation with the researched individual. This mindfulness on emerging personal or professional relation disposes the researcher to acknowledge the generosity of the interviewee in sharing his/her time and for allowing the reconstructive process to commence. This is how the researcher opens a sense of access to the personal or positive core by communicating a strong sense of respect for the presence, and ideas of the other. For mutuality, the challenge is to diffuse the sense of hierarchy between the researcher and the researched. This is addressed by providing an atmosphere of partnership, where mutuality is communicated, and collaborative relations are allowed to regulate the entire life story research. The notion of mutuality also seeks to reinforce relationality by empowering the researched and in the process, exchange enabling gestures. For empathy, the researcher aims to be mindful of reflexivity or the way a researcher describes the shift from being conscious of the feelings, ideas of the other to his/her feelings and ideas; as well as allowing the interview to do the same. By becoming reflexive, the researcher is empowered to reflect on the process of reconstructing life stories such as the experience in self-disclosure, and the shift in authority as the life story research unfolds. Finally, care, sensitivity and respect are communicated, felt and lived in the research process. This is the authentic experience, which the researcher and the researched acknowledge and cherish. In the case of respect, for instance, the researcher is challenged to value and protect the integrity of the story with his/her utmost ability (Cole and Knowles, 2001).

The narrative approach being the primary method in this study is informed by the rudiments of ethnography. With ethnography, the requirement is to visit and immerse in the field as the site of the research (Creswell, 2013). This demands that the social context of the area

where the life stories of the women politicians revolve is observed, lived and qualitatively described. The interview with a woman politician ran for at least two hours; and the interview process was guided by these parts: (a) Contextualizing questions, (b) Path-ways to Power questions, (c) Contributions to women agenda questions, and (d) Imagination-trajectory questions. Since the interviews were recorded, transcripts were also generated, and translated in English. Thematic analysis of the narrative followed which identified key concepts, thoughts or constructs.

The discursive analytic part of the study stems from Foucault's (1990) notion of discontinuities and technologies of the self (1988) within the ambit of women's political participation as political leaders in the Dinagat Islands. In broad yet critical strokes, the discursive point of analysis center on these questions: Do the life stories of select women politicians reinforce the stance that all women in politics are benchwarmers in relation to their male kin? Or, are their life stories counterfactual to the claims of the benchwarmer phenomenon?

LOCATION OF THE STUDY

Dinagat Islands is a province in CARAGA region in Mindanao created through Republic Act No. 9355 in 2007 but faced legal battles before its official validation by the Supreme Court on April 12, 2011. It is a single legislative district comprised of seven (7) municipalities, namely: Basilisa, Cagdianao, Dinagat, Libjo, Loreto, San Jose, and Tubajon. The capital and seat of government is the Municipality of San Jose. It has a land area of eighty thousand two hundred twelve hectares (80,212 ha) and according to the latest inventory conducted by DENR there are 256 islands and islets in Dinagat. These groups of islands are located to the northeast of Surigao del Norte. In 2015 census, Dinagat Islands has a population of 127,152 Dinagatnon. Majority speak Cebuano and Surigaonon, although many migrants from other provinces also speak Boholano and Hiligaynon.

The province is home to Ruben Ecleo Sr.'s Philippine Benevolent Missionaries Association (PBMA). Ecleo known as the "Divine Master" by his followers founded PBMA in 1960s. PBMA's membership grew and many learned the healing powers from the Divine Master. From Divine Master, he was elected mayor of Dinagat in the 60s, when it was still a part of Surigao Del Norte Province, and remained an official until his death in 1987. He was survived by his wife, Glenda and children who also held and continue to hold major elective posts in the province. The existence of a strong dynastic family for over half a century is also one of the reasons for the choice of the location of the study.

Narrative 1: The First Woman Mayor of Tubajon

A Political Bloodline. This Sangguniang Bayan Member is the first woman mayor of Tubajon. She belongs to a family of politicians. She recounts that while growing up, she always aspired to become a politician. “*Siguro, ipinanganak ako para sa pulitika.*” (It is in my blood). This was how she described her natural affinity to politics. To be more exact, she connects and attributes such affinity to the influence of her grandfather whom she grew up with, and her father who was still in the position when she first ran for a political post – as Barangay Captain in one of the nine barangays of Tubajon. Despite her mother’s clear disapproval to her political aspiration, she won the post and became the Association Barangay Captain (ABC) President at the Municipal level. She was 24 years old when she held such position.

Such event in her life of also serve as a turning point as she confidently declared to her family that she no longer has plans of taking the licensure exam for her Nursing degree which she earned from Cebu State College. She specified that: “*I only studied Nursing to get the diploma and not disappoint my parents. I did not even take the board exam.*” Conversely, her first political position as Barangay Captain meant that she has officially started her career as a politician. Moreover, her being the ABC President in the Municipality disposed her to a subsequent chapter in her political career. This brought her to a strategic situation to run for the Mayoralty, since it was also her father’s last term as Municipality Mayor. She recalls that her father wanted their mother to run for the position. The plan, however, did not push through, since the citizenship of her mother was riddled with protests from the opposing political party. Her mother, despite living in the country for more than four decades, was still a Chinese Citizen. Fearing disqualification, she stepped-in and declared that she will run for the position even in the absence of nomination from any member of the political party.

Similar to her first intent in running for a political post as Barangay Captain, it was her boldness that convinced her father to support her bid for the Mayoralty position. Withstanding unclear support from their political party and her family, she won the election and became the first female and youngest Mayor in the province of Surigao del Norte at the age of 27 in 1998.

Between Uncertainty and Certainty. After such term, she, however, found herself in a precarious situation. She lost in the succeeding election, and her political aspirations came to a temporary halt when her father’s health deteriorated which eventually led to his death. The unfolding

circumstance proved difficult for her as she started to have doubts if she could still run for a political office. Conditioned by her uncertainty, it was also at this point when she entertained the idea of migrating to the USA. This was a plan, which was partly motivated by the request of her younger sister.

Unlike her sister, she, however, distinguished herself from her sibling by saying that she has always been an *election fanatic*. She explains that she has never backed out of an opportunity to run for a position. Election time always made her excited and eager to go through the rounds of campaign, meeting people, and assisting them in their needs. It is this sense of fulfillment that also serve as her light in making the decision of not pushing through with the processing of her migration papers. Drawn in by the revelries of and challenges in an approaching election season, she recalls how she enthusiastically said yes to an invitation to run for an office as Sangguniang Bayan Member in 2010. Despite being in Manila, she immediately travelled back to Tubajon and filed her Certificate of Candidacy (COC).

With her COC in place, the opposing teams of Mayor Vargas and the Mayoralty Candidate Arturo Domingo Toro-Toro invited her to join their respective political parties. Given the invites, she had a brief moment of uncertainty, since she was about to choose between the team of the incumbent Mayor who was the cause of her defeat in the previous election, or the opposing group which she characterized as the sure route to defeat. “*Akong huna-huna, kining si Vargas, mao ning nakaingun nga napildi mi, kay tungod ba nga mangaraw. Oo pero ug adto ko dadto sa pikas nga buotan, pareha ra gyapon sa nahitabo namu nga napildi mi, tungod nga ang among mga tao, gipanghulga. So ni-join ko diri sa isug, diri ko niapil ni mayor Vargas.*” (Will I join Mayor Vargas even if he was the reason why I lost in the previous election? Or, will I choose the other side whose supporters will be easily threatened by the brave and intimidating group of the incumbent Mayor?). Given such conditions, she decided to be in the ticket of Mayor Vargas. This was a decision, which her family categorically did not agree with, however. As a consequence, Leslie did not communicate with her for a year, and not a single member of the family supported her in victory. “*Wala akong pamilya nga nag-apil, ako ra.*” (I was on my own) she recalls with clarity.

A Generation of Followers. On her third term now as a Sangguniang Bayan Member, she is also the Federation President from a pool of 63 SB members. When asked why she was voted into the position, she acknowledged the generation of supporters who have been with their family since the time of her grandfather and father. She fondly shares that:

“...maskin katong mga leaders ni lolo, naganak na then anak napud nila ang leader karon, maskin ang uban kay apo na nagleader gihapon sa amu.” (Even the siblings and grandchildren of my grandfather’s leaders still support me to date). She adds that she keeps her supporters by closely attending to their problems. She explains: “Mao na sila akong gipang-alagaan so everytime nga naa silay problema, ako gyud ang muadto. Ako sila gyung adtuon bisan sa mga ginagmayng problema.” (I take care of them; and I personally come to their rescue even if the problem is no cause for alarm).

In keeping her generation of followers, she shares the details of a crucial and personal experience, which somehow tested yet strengthened their relation. In 2013 election, she was seriously sick and went to Cebu for medication. She had a myoma, which required a major operation and blood transfusion. Since she needed a rare blood type (RH, negative O), the operation was delayed for two weeks. While staying in the hospital, she still remembers the reaction and response of the attending physician when she said: “Dok, operahe nako kay hapit nang eleksyon.” (Doc, please perform the operation now, since it is nearly election time). To such request, she recounts that Doctor’s reply: “Hapit naka mamatay, election gihapon imung gi-huna-huna?” (You are almost dying and yet you still think about the elections). She, however said: “Dili man jud kay nahinayak na unya akong mga tao didto, nangita na to nako” (It is just that I have gone this far and it will be a shame if I quit now. My supporters are looking for me). Recalling the Doctor’s disbelief over her concerns, the operation proceeded in May 9, and she returned to Tubajon on May 12 – just in time for the May 13 elections.

She also remembers how her frail condition and hospital bills disallowed her from participating in the campaign and in providing financial assistance to her political party and followers. Despite such constraints, she still won in the elections and secured the third spot over-all. This is a phase in her political career, which she is proud of. She underscores such phase as a test of her followers’ loyalty. More to the point, that period showed that her followers were more than willing to shell out their money just so her political campaign will land-in positive results. “Mao na nga sukad adto, kung unsa akong pagtagad nila sa wala pa to nahitabo, mas nadugang pa karon ang among relationship tungod adtong murag test ba. Through thick and thin gajud diay mi.” (Since then, I treasured our relationship, since they – her supporters – were with me through thick and thin.) While she admitted that she might have lost in the election since she was unable to provide even a single centavo, her doubts were replaced with clarity and conviction over her supporters’ commitment.

Now, she is 46 years old and she recounts that she has been in politics

for 19 years. With certainty, she attributes her success to generations of supporters who made it possible for her to win in the previous election. “*Kay ang among treatment, dili na as supporter and pulitiko relationship, dili na, ang amua as family na.*” (I treat my supporters as family). This was how she described and affirmed her deep and personal relationship with her generation of supporters.

The Gaze of a Woman Politician. How does she look at violence done on women? She said that she gets easily angered and affected when she encounters cases of violence against women and children. This explains why she ensures to directly talk to the perpetrator even if the person is one of her close supporters. “*Istoryahon lang in a nice way nga dili na maayo, pwede ka ma-presyo.*” (I talk to them and remind them that they can go to jail because of their actions). In one instance, she even advised a woman to buy muriatic acid for her husband. It was a statement she uttered out of frustration, anger, and disbelief explaining that at times, it is difficult to control one’s temper when confronted with such realities.

With regard to women’s health, she shared that when she was still the Municipality Mayor, she had programs for pregnant women. This included buying clothes for infants and maternal care kits. The program, she narrates was made to discourage women from giving birth in their residence. With her nursing background, she understands the danger of not giving birth in a hospital and of not having the appropriate birthing facilities. “*Mao na nga mas pabor ko nga naay mga leaders nga babae. Mas advocate ko ana.*” (This is one reason why I also advocate for more women political leaders). Because according to her, women are: “*...mas sensitive ang mga babae, mas makasabot, motherly, caring jud unya realistic.*” (more sensitive, understanding, motherly, caring and realistic). These are the characteristics that she thinks necessary especially when dealing with the concerns and issues of women. Being realistic, she clarifies that it refers to the value that women attach to promises. As she remarked: “*Ang mga babae, dili magsaad-saad... naay word of honor kumbaga.*” (Women do as promised).

Given that women honor their promises, she thinks that such virtue is needed to address corruption in the government. Unlike men, she clarifies that women are afraid to commit or be engaged in illegal transactions. When asked where such fear is coming from, she explained that it is grounded on a woman’s fear of God. In addition, women do not want to be sued and be publicly shamed as consequence to illegal actions or transactions. They need to consider their children’s welfare and its possible effect to their family if women become entangled in corrupt projects. It is such concerns, which she recounts as part of the strength of

women politicians. She adds that it is such values, which also distinguishes women from men in politics.

Some Skills of a Woman Leader. When dealing with men in politics, her close relationship with her grandfather and father afforded her skills in dealing with them. She shared that: “*Para kasi best friend ko yung papa ko so we can talk anything under the sun.*” (My father was my best friend. We can talk about anything). It is because of such close relation that she finds it easy or natural to converse and negotiate with men, especially with the male officials in the Sangguniang Bayan. This openness to conversation and in expressing her ideas even extends to her experience with her husband who once requested that she leave the world of politics. To such plea, she recalled saying: “*Whether you like it or not, I will run!*” Her husband, despite his opposition to her political participation, however, remained supportive. She disclosed that her husband – acknowledging even his small contribution, drives for her especially during campaign period.

Being in politics for almost two decades now, she shared that her joy and passion in being part of the political arena has always been due to her natural liking to talking and mingling with people. She also proudly notes that it is a skill, which is also noticeable in her youngest son. Because of such attribute, she considers the possibility that one of her children will follow in her footsteps and continue the family’s legacy as politicians in the municipality of Tubajon. Noting that the municipality came into existence because of her grandfather’s efforts, she takes pride in the fact that she has contributed to the continuation of such legacy. When asked how important the municipality of Tubajon to the family is, she always considers the municipality as the fruit of her grandfather’s hard work.

Women and Girls in Tubajon. The economic activities in the municipality involve fishing and farming. Mining is also present which she hopes will cease to operate soon. In relation to programs that address cases of Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC), She notes that it remains difficult to know the real situation or gravity of the crime, since abused women often do not tell the entirety of their story. Victims usually report only part of their experiences. When asked why such is the case, she explains that victims still factor in the image of the family. These women do not want to bring disgrace to their family’s name or reputation. A case of abuse, however, stood out in her memory. She narrated the case of a wife who was hit by a dagger. She remembers rushing to the scene of the crime and ushering the husband to the municipal office. After some paper works, she ensured that the husband will be put behind bars. Despite her effort, she lamented how wives would eventually forgive their husbands and lift the case against their partners. Since there are cases of VAWC

in the municipality, what preventive measures are done or programs implemented to address such concerns? To this question, she noted that awareness-raising campaigns frequented schools/academic institutions, and there have been attempts to integrate such campaigns as regular parts of school programs.

But aside from VAWC cases, the municipality also addressed health issues and concerns among young women. She, for instance, described a sub-set program of Mindanao Poverty Reduction Action (MINPRA) in the municipality, which taught girls to use clean clothes instead of napkins to improve personal hygiene and to prevent infections. This is a sample program wherein young woman, including the out-of-school youth, are encouraged to participate for health and wellness interventions. In addition to such interventions, she explained that livelihood trainings were also provided hoping that these young women will be motivated to be entrepreneurial in the future.

What is her view of the young women in Tubajon? She considers the young women of Tubajon hardworking. In their communities, she specified that informal gatherings among girls at night rarely happen. These women even at a young age already participate in farming and fishing, she noted. In fishing, for instance, girls are involved in gathering sea cucumbers and sea grass. In Roxas, she described how some girls and women earn additional income from mat weaving and chandelier making, which makes use of shells. She proudly notes that these are some of the economic activities, which girls and women in the municipality engage in and earn from.

With regard to education, the province provided education opportunities through scholarships, which were made available when the lone representative of the province assumed into office. Prior to such opportunity, she recalls how young girls used to apply as helpers in other cities just to earn, and save money for education. But with the scholarships, these girls opted to study hard, and earn a diploma by completing a degree. For her, the scholarships opened vast opportunities for young girls in the province. The support, however, encountered difficulties especially with the legality of the Disbursement Acceleration Fund (DAF) was put into question. To respond to the crisis situation, she looked for families and households in Surigao del Sur, employees in Caraga Hospital, and State Universities who could possibly adopt the students and hire them as working students. She specified that she needed to do that, since it will be almost impossible for the students' parents to shoulder the costs of college education. But with the help of CHED's Tulong Dunong Program, the students were able to continue in their studies.

Guiding Future Women Leaders. For women who aspire to go into politics, she advises that they should just be themselves. To further underscore such point, she recommends that it is important to show one's true character so one need not hide anything, or be restrained in expressing one's point of view. On such point, she was keen on the importance of expressing one's true self since it is there where a woman can also find her true freedom. She adds that the label politician must be built upon the person's character. It is not the other way around. For her, it is such authenticity, which should stand out in a woman politician.

Back in the days, she recounted how she would play the role of the Doctor or the Mayor during school plays. For her, such experience was all because of her innate liking to socialize and be with other people. At such a young age, she recalls her grandfather's request: "*Kausapin mo siya, judge yan.*" (Talk to him; he is a judge). And so, she did. She was still four years old when she also sang a song for the Judge. Such moment lingered in her memory, and for her, that symbolized the passion she has when it comes to socializing and being with others. And it is this trait, which she also hopes will serve as the best preparation for other women who aspire to become politicians. Will she be a politician forever? In her words: "*It [to become a politician] has long been my dream. . . Mag-enjoy gyud ko, kanang makigstorya ug mga tao, happy ko ana. Murag fulfillment nako makatabang ko. Siguro, ipinanganak ako para sa pulitika kay para sa ako, murag bibo man, enjoy... So siguro, if God permits.*" (I have always been certain that I will be a politician, and I will be a politician until I retire). If looked at reflectively, such are the words that speak of her sincerity in holding her present position and her personal vision, which serve as her light in the complex world of politics.

Narrative 2: Church Volunteer Turned Public Servant

Social Advocacy as Training Ground. This vice Mayor started her advocacy for social work in the church in looking for solutions to social issues. She volunteered in the social action center in their local parish. Her exposure to the ideals of the church when it comes to clean and honest politics helped her carve a core value that puts premium to raising consciousness in transparency especially during elections. Her political interest was influenced by her critique to traditional political patronage, white elephant projects, and engagement of intimidation strategies to voters during elections. It is through this critical lens and value for conscience that guided many of her dealings with church-based apostolate or extension work.

She began her political career as a Punong Barangay. At first, she had hesitations in entering politics—a world that she critically considered. She often asked herself, “*Will I be different from traditional politicians?*”—a question she seriously considered before running for a political post. Guided by the principle of “never using money to influence people’s decision” and with the strong support of her confidants, she won the position of Punong Barangay. She clearly recalls that her entering into politics was a sort of experiment whether people will choose you based on their appreciation of what you can do for them and your capacity as public servant or will be influenced by money or done out of fear. She, however, maintained her principle of honesty and transparency when she ran for Vice Mayor in the midst of her doubts that people might be influenced by money and aggression. But with hard work and faith in people’s capacity to see beyond traditional political tactics and strategies, she won the Vice Mayor position in 2010. Her victory inspired her to set the principle of honest and clean election as dogma behind her success that she is most proud of.

Discovering One’s Self in Politics. Becoming a Vice Mayor has put her in a viable position to help others, especially the marginalized individuals, and even those who are socially disadvantaged. Being aware of such difficult situations, she critically examines herself whether she has done enough to extend her services to those who are in need. Being a woman in political service often finds the need to confront the dominating presence and influence of men in politics and compares herself with how male politicians provide assistance to their constituents. Psychologically, she believes that women are more conscientious than men. For instance, women politicians often comment, “*Why is the project proposal like this? One should carefully track the completion of activities. Projects are not done chronologically. This project is not needed. This is what should be done, instead.*” To her, it is paramount that one should uphold standards. When errors occur, then one should take note of the loopholes and learn from it. This aggressive and critical outlook is actually reflective of her notion of time and opportunity: “*Each day is an occasion to do better and be better.*” She also relates her critical attention to details to the act of weaving. She notes that working in the government means carefully checking if each strand works and contributes to the completion of the entire project. It is unlikely of her to sleep soundly at night hearing rumors that projects are half-baked. “*I become restless. I asked myself, ‘God what have I done?’*” I cannot even sleep properly.” So, she always sees to it that projects are made to completion.

Prioritizing the Well-being of Others. Her motivation to help

others put her in the position of using even her family's resources; even to the point of borrowing money from her siblings, cousins and friends just so she could provide financial assistance to her constituents who are confined in hospitals. She laments if she could hardly extend help: "*My conscience tells me that is my responsibility.*" To her, acting at once to people in need is of utmost priority. She also considers the political implications of her actions. She believes that maintaining people's trust is difficult when you constantly fail them. It is hard for her to imagine in such position considering that it is the same failure that she criticized of previous local administrations. She knows that it would be very hard to expect these people to trust you and put you in a position when they knew that you failed them and they felt abandoned in their most trying times.

Defending her position as entrusted by the people, she also stressed the importance of redeeming the faith of the people to the government. This is one of the bigger aims that she sets her eyes on. She recognizes the need to incline people to enabling conditions so they can regain their trust in the capacity and purpose of the local government unit. This is key to her drive to be an inspiration and a good example of a woman public servant. She even encourages her staff to focus on their tasks and seriously pay attention to discussions, especially when attending seminars and trainings. She expects her staff to be on their toes when they are attending trainings considering that their registrations and travels are paid by people's taxes. It is her way of cultivating the proper attitude and behavior of government employees.

Women Issues in the Municipality. Treading in a landscape of male-dominated politics has many challenges. According to her, much is expected from women than men in politics. For instance, if men committed mistakes, people would usually just shrug their shoulders. But when women got into mishaps, people could easily roll their eyes and negatively judge them. This duality of norms is something that she seeks to rectify. To her, every public servant—be it woman or man—is expected to deliver appropriate development agenda in the municipality. While admitting that she also struggles with the social and cultural expectations, she lays her eyes on more important things such as delivering assistance and providing help to the people in the locality.

Over the past years serving the people of the Dinagat Islands, she learned to look past gender differences when it comes to serving the community. She constantly reminds herself that the backbone of being a public servant is the people's trust. "*You really need to work hard because you have more than 2,000 individuals who trusted you, so you need to give back to the people the service they deserve.*" That's how she describes her foundation

in the local government and her self-expectations that she fulfills her obligations that come along with her position.

In addition, she discusses the situation of women in fishing, farming, and mining sectors in the province. She highlights the most disturbing social issue that is affecting women and their children—the problem of illegal drugs abuse in the municipality, saying that when husbands engaged into this illegal activity, the wives and children suffer the shame and consequences of those actions. She observed that in the midst of this dilemma, the wives tried to stay strong for their children. As to how to address this problem, she often found herself perplexed knowing not how to solve this seemingly complicated issue and seeing that these women continue to be vulnerable.

Remaining true to her critical lens as a public servant, she often gets disappointed finding mothers who are recipients of the Government's Conditional Cash Program, like the 4Ps Program, resorting to unnecessary spending like expensive cellular phones, or engaging into gambling vices like playing tong-its or swertres. These encumbrances have negative consequences to their children's health and educational needs. She hopes that these families would be uplifted if government programs on livelihood such as poultry and swine raising were well implemented and sustained.

Becoming a Woman Leader. She hopes that women leaders should be well provided with capacity development to empower them, and equip them as front liners in governance. She encourages women to courageously face their fears that prevent them from truly serving the public; and challenge these women to live up to the expectations of the people to be good examples of women in political service. When her time to serve ends, she hopes that she can one day say this line: *"My time has passed; and now is your turn. Please make sure to accomplish more than what I have done and pursue those that I have not accomplished,"* reminding women the importance of doing their best and following the right path by doing what is right.

Developing Partnerships. In her eagerness to inspire and influence young women to participate in politics, she shared an unforgettable story about a Lumad – in this case, lumad refers to a born in Dinagat but who is not a member of the PBMA as opposed to lumad generally referring to indigenous peoples in Mindanao – which she considered a foundation in serving the public. According to the story, the Lumad, despite lacking formal education—who only knew how to read and write his name—was appointed chairman in his community. Aware of his limitations, he constantly asked the assistance of teachers in his community. The teachers helped him understand the various letters he received and filed

them accordingly. Together, as suggested by the teachers, they underwent budget planning. The Lumad leader followed the advice of the teachers, including the presentation of the budget to the community during Parent-Teachers' Association (PTA) gatherings, where the financial status and usage of community funds are also reported. This collaborative practice meant transparency and assured the participation of the people in the community. The main point of the story, according to her, was the need to establish fruitful partnership with the teachers in the locality. *"It is good if your partners are teachers. They are professionals; they do not have any political interests, and they are experts when it comes to development,"* she remarked.

For her, partnering with the Department of Education is a good feat considering that most of the day-to-day dealings in the community are involved in the education of people. *"If I helped the children, I also helped their parents and families."* That is how vital the role of the school is when it comes to community development. This principle traces back to her priority programs when she started her political career as Punong Barangay. Even in those early days of public service, the lesson of the Lumad leader already fueled her passion to serve—working with the teachers and the school. This is also the reason why the local government should always partner with the Department of Education in the implementation of programs and projects. *"Graduation is development in itself."* To her, it is that through education that people will know and appreciate the role of various sectors in the community – such as fishing and farming, in the much larger network of relations within the framework of community participation and development.

Narrative 3: Worked Abroad and Working Anew as Mayor

Trailblazer. When she was younger, she would imagine herself becoming a nurse and working in the United States. Her father tried to downplay her dream because he wanted her to be a teacher and manage the family owned school. She was very persistent though and stood her ground in her desire to be a nurse. She recalled that she was also amiss as to why she was very passionate about it. She now explained that she second guessed herself and attributed it to being an introvert that made her less interested with his father's political campaigns, and business activities. Her mother, meanwhile, did not interfere in her decision as she let her chose her own path. With her father's lack of support, she still proceeded with the Nursing degree in Southern Islands Hospital, School of Nursing in 1968 and Bachelor Degree in Nursing in Philippine Women's University,

Manila in 1969. She also married Major Abraham P. Quijano, had three children, and worked as a nurse in the US until she retired in 2012.

“If I am going to run, it’s not for anything but for service.” The first woman mayor of Loreto had no plan of running for an elective post. In fact, she was not interested in following her father’s footsteps in contrast to her two brothers. In 1986, her brother, Servillano I. Ladaga was appointed by former President Cory Aquino as caretaker mayor of Loreto and remained mayor until 1998. She described her brothers as good mayors. Loreto, the northern most tip of the island of Dinagat, has ten barangays with fishing and farming as its major economic activities, and is classified as a 4th class municipality. Citing some of her brother’s achievements, Mayor Vil brought electricity, water, bridges, and concrete roads to the community. Like her, Mayor Vil and Mayor Andres, Jr. were hands-on mayor and was favored by many in Loreto. He was supposed to run again for Mayor after his brother, Andres I. Ladaga, Jr., completed his third term in June 2007 but he was stabbed to death in June 2005. The unfortunate incident was said to be politically motivated. Sadly, she also lost her brother Andres, the incumbent mayor, to cancer in March 2006.

In 2007, the son of Mayor Vil, her nephew ran for office and won. He lasted two terms (6 years) and she then realized that it was time to serve Loreto and its residents. She became interested to run for the position after seeing her nephew’s lackluster performance in governing the municipality. She, however, explained that the inadequacy may have been due to her nephew’s lack of experience, and wisdom in addressing issues such as corruption, unliquidated cash advances, and drugs. Initially, she was resolved to “return” the post to her nephew once he becomes ready for the job.

In her first term, however, she realized that there was so much space for reform. She also discovered the lapses and errors of her nephew and understood the need to correct those. She also realized that she is capable of doing governance work more than her nephew. For instance, she collected taxes from mining companies that have been operating in Loreto that the previous mayor failed to do. She also used the income to implement her projects and programs. As someone who is used to hard work abroad, she applied the same values and work ethics in her governance as mayor. Part of her early realizations included how a sincere public servant can make a big difference in a poor municipality. These, coupled with network building, and strengthening of partnerships with other public officials, made development in Loreto possible. In the first 100 days of her first term, she was able to set into motion plans was the concreting of municipal wharf. Re-blocking and concreting of municipal roads,

2.5M half-way building of Rural Health Unit (RHU) and four farm-to-market roads, acquisition of municipal heavy equipment and government vehicles like bus which were intended for the students and local employees for provincial activities participation, a 10 million multipurpose hall, and increased collection from mining companies, which consequently increased Loreto's income. With the improvements, her decision to run for another term was fueled by her desire to implement more plans to make a difference in the municipality despite objections from her children.

Learning the Ropes. Politics is not new in her life having been raised by a father who was once in politics and with her two siblings who became mayors. At a young age, however, she knew she did not want anything to do with the path the men in her family took. But when an opportunity came for her to serve Loreto, she took that chance and eventually valued the post as a way of helping the people in the community. In her first term as mayor, she was even surprised to have found out that she actually liked doing the job. Being in politics, for instance, suited her well and kept her young looking as observed by her friends and colleagues. But beyond the pleasure of serving the community, she also learned the ropes in effective governance and in the process, discovered new aspects of herself and even developed new skills as she attended the DOH Municipal Leadership and Governance Program (MLGP) & Kaya Natin Leadership for Excellence and Public Service Mayors Fellowship Program (LEAP).

With her newfound passion, she stressed the importance of getting familiar with government processes and mechanisms in implementing projects and programs like KALAHI CIDSS-NCDDP & BUB. Through her efforts, Loreto became one of the first-time beneficiaries of the said projects. With this principle in mind, she ensures that she joins her key people in conferences and dialogues with other officials. In that way, she got to know how her people work and how things are done in the ground. Their farm to market roads, as a case in point, did not almost push through because it lacked one minor requirement, which she was able to address because she personally asked an official from the Department of Agriculture in one of the conferences she attended. As a form of acknowledgement from the people she worked with, she cited a comment from a personnel of a government agency: "*Mayor, ikaw palang siguro pinakaunang mayor na nag-attend sa service namin, kung saan-saan kami pumunta, walang mayor na nag-attend.*" (Commission on Civil Service personnel). Given the DILG Provincial Director's appreciation, the director commented that in his DILG experience, she is the only mayor who is prepared with a detailed action plan for the municipality.

Valuing the importance of networking and knowing the right

people as a swifter way of implementing projects, she knows that an effective networking means making yourself visible and accessible to officials from various agencies. In most local government units, she laments the practice of head of municipalities or cities who habitually assign representatives to meet with these officials. For her she needs to be present in almost all the visits of these officials in Loreto. She has found out how a warm welcome, care, and attention can make a huge difference in future dialogues and negotiations. One example is her continued presence in MRFC (Mine Rehabilitation Fund Committee) meetings so she can directly address mining related issues and concerns. This is the same strategy that conditioned or made possible the conduct of TESDA trainings and the establishment of Department of Trade and Industry's Negosyo Centre in Loreto. She explains that the personal rapport and good relations with government agencies made it easier to negotiate and forge partnerships. It was also worth noting that she was not at all embarrassed to admit when she does not know something. She candidly shared how she would ask colleagues or fellow mayors in conferences about acronyms and concepts new to her during her first term. For her, this is something that many government officials would not readily admit.

Brand of Leadership and Work Ethics. Transparency and good governance were the major themes in her platform which are evident in the way she governs and in her work ethics. *"I'm not gonna promise anything. You'll just see what I can do. Basta I just want transparency. I don't know what will happen."* In her first electoral run, for instance, she knew she did not know anything about governing or being a mayor except those that she has observed when her father was in power. Consequently, she did not promise anything to her constituency in the campaign trail. She only magnified her commitment to make her government transparent. This is captured in one of her statements: *"That's why some said they won't vote for me because of my ugaling ganyan but I don't even care. Do I care kung hindi ako mag mayor? No. Kasi wala akong nakukuha maski isang sentimo being a mayor. I get nothing so if you want progress in Loreto, then I will stay as a mayor but if you don't want? No. I don't care."* In line with transparency as best practice, the municipality of Loreto is one of the awardees out of 1,672 local governments assessed, complied with the 2016 Seal of Good Local Governance criteria. Out of the seven municipalities in the province of Dinagat Islands, for instance, only Loreto passed the said assessment. Recently, one of the barangays of Loreto – Barangay Esperanza, was a top 3 qualifiers for the Gawad Kalasag Award 2016. Moreover, the municipality of Loreto received an incentive for its best practices on solid waste management implementation in accordance with the RA 9003 Ecological Solid Waste Management Act.

This was validated by actual evaluations conducted by the Environment Management Bureau (EMB).

The people in Loreto knew her as strict mayor, and at times, or called a dictator. This is something which she finds amusing, since she knows that unlike other politicians, she has no plans of pleasing others simply to get their votes or support. She proudly notes that she speaks her mind and is known to do things even if they were unpopular or even if it means losing votes. She explains that clinging to power is an alien concept to her and the idea that she can imagine herself outside politics is one of the reasons why she can afford to do what is principled and right. This kind of attitude also helped her cope with false malicious attacks such as corruption to drugs. She, however, believes that the people in Loreto are intelligent enough to do their own research and smart enough not to believe the accusations. She noted that the accusations can also be disproven by the projects completed under her watch. She did not only ensure the completion of projects, but she made sure that the outputs are of good quality. The roads built in her term even exceeded the standard measurement indicated in the project plan. The engineers and other people she has worked with knew that they cannot outwit her. For her, the success of the project also serves as evidence that the allocated budget for projects were properly used.

With regard to birthday celebrations, she also proudly notes that she uses her own money which implies limited budget and a simple private celebration in her home. Going against the usual expectations during birthday celebrations, the habit earned her a reputation of being *kuripot* (stingy) and ungenerous as others perceive the practice as an undesirable trait of a politician. The thrifty disposition, however, is something which she naturally attributes to her work ethics and experience in the United States where she stayed for two decades. Moreover, the disposition is something, which she also traces back to her role as a mother. She explains that in her family, transparency and good household governance are non-negotiable concerns. She adds that her children imbibed such values, which she also wants her constituents to appreciate and if possible, learn from.

Breaking the Glass Ceiling. She is the first woman mayor of Loreto. Like most woman politicians in the country who have shattered the glass-ceiling phenomenon, she came from a political family. She believed that women have tried to break the glass ceiling only recently because for the longest time being a politician is considered a man's job. She further pointed out that patronage politics is something that men are so used to while women have difficulty doing. In our political culture, for instance, she said that patronage still plays a great part in winning elections and

keeping the post. She, however, refused to join the traditional bandwagon. When her opponent was buying votes, for instance, she stood her ground and maintained her attitude — “*if they do not want progress then they can vote for someone else.*” This was how she asserted her principles against vote buying.

In breaking the glass ceiling, one strategy which she upholds is to build partnerships with fellow woman politicians. She values the role and importance of being part of a network of other woman mayors and women politicians. She shared that she also looks up to a congresswoman who opposed and defeated a well-entrenched political dynasty in the province, the Ecleos. Moreover, she sees this congresswoman a political brand that reflects her own: the coupling of transparency and good governance as key principles in their political platform. This respect and admiration somehow helped in her decision to seek for a third term in 2019.

Dream for Loreto. She dreams of a sustainable eco-tourism for Loreto and eventually hopes to eliminate mining activities in the municipality. After completing the rest of the planned infrastructure projects, she is keen on focusing on eco-tourism given that the municipality of Loreto is rich in natural resources such as diving sites, caves, and around 160 hectares of bonsai forest. On such note, she sees the inclusive and empowering potentials in developing a sustainable eco-tourism plan as the major economic activity of the municipality, which does not sacrifice the integrity of the municipality’s natural resources.

Narrative 4: The Dragon Slayer

Alternative Lawyer Marches to the Halls of Congress. Before she entered the world of a male-dominated politics, the Dinagat Lone District Representative was a public interest lawyer who championed agrarian reform. She was one of the founders of BALAOD Mindanao, an alternative law group working for the interest of marginalized groups such as farmers, fisher folks, women, and indigenous peoples. She is also remembered as part of the lead counsel who marched, together with now Vice-President Leni Robredo, with the Sumilao farmers from Bukidnon to Manila in 2007. It can be recalled that the historic march demanded the return of the farmers’ ancestral land that San Miguel Foods, Inc. converted into a hog farm. True to form, she was also one of the counsels for the Banasi farmers of Camarines Sur and the Catalagan farmers of Batangas. With her commitment for true agrarian reform, it is important to note that the Sumilao farmers and Banasi farmers were victorious in reclaiming their land.

Her involvement in the aforementioned cases brought her to the radar of Akbayan Citizens Action Party to which she is a member, which paved the way for her selection as the second nominee and eventually the second representative of Akbayan Party list in the 15th Philippine Congress. This was an unexpected turn of events for her who never imagined a political career and was happy being an agrarian reform advocate and a public interest lawyer. With the unfolding, she had to consult the sector she has been serving as an alternative lawyer. Her decision to accept the nomination was also based upon her realization that the post brings with it the opportunity to push for certain advocacies in the legislative arena. But even as nominee of the party, she admits that she still did not see it as a political career. This outlook was partly conditioned by the fact that a party list nominee campaigns for the party and not as an individual. It was only when Akbayan won two seats in the recent elections that she got to sit as the second representative and realized that part of the job is becoming the face of the party.

Women Shattering the Glass Ceiling. Akbayan is the only political party in the Philippines that “has a constitutionally-mandated quota of thirty percent for women in its leadership in all of its party units” (Gumba, 2000). This requirement translates to one female nominee among the top three nominees of the party. Its first representative to the Lower House in the 11th to 13th Congress was Congresswoman Etta Rosales and was followed by now Senator Risa Hontiveros in the 14th Congress. Hontiveros also won the first senate seat for Akbayan in 2016, after three attempts. Women in Akbayan have long been breaking the glass ceiling and have occupied leadership positions within and outside the party. She was the third female representative of the party in Congress. The women before her, together with other women leaders from Mindanao, are women she admires because of their courage, and principles, and she also highlighted how articulate these women are in expressing their point of views. Looking up to such standards, she tried to live up to the same standards.

In explaining the nomination process, she attributed the nomination in the party to her being a woman lawyer from Mindanao. Her long experience in working with farmers and other marginalized sectors, and her experience as public interest lawyer somehow served as preparatory grounds for her current position as legislator. It is important to note that together with her fellow Akbayan representative, Congressman Walden Bello authored numerous bills that have long been pushed by various sectors. One of these bills, which later on became a law, is the Republic Act 10354 or the Reproductive Health Law. True to the party’s commitment to fight corruption and forward good governance, she was

also one of the prosecutors in the impeachment trial of Supreme Court Chief Justice Renato Corona. The trial also brought her to the national limelight.

In October 2012, another crucial turn in her political career was conditioned by her appointment as province legislative liaison or caretaker of the lone District of the Dinagat Islands. This happened in her first term as second representative of Akbayan Party List. The new appointment was consequent to the expulsion of the province's District Representative Ruben Ecleo, Jr. who was convicted of parricide and graft and corruption charges. Taking on the task of a District Representative, she ensured that all projects and programs are implemented. The position also made her realize that opportunities for development abound for the province, which may translate into livelihood, scholarships, and basic services especially if the allocated funds are wisely spent and accounted for.

Slaying the Dragon. As caretaker of the province, she ensured that all programs and projects were implemented and that the infrastructures were properly built. Municipalities now have concrete farm to market roads, and the travel time between municipalities was reduced which is attributed to the high-quality roads, bridges and ports. Since the province only has three hospitals, which try to attend to the health needs of seven municipalities (Basilisa, Cagdianao, Dinagat, Libjo, Loreto, San Jose, and Tubajon), she prioritized the construction of a provincial hospital in her first term as District Representative in 2013.

Since winning a congressional seat in 2013 was no simple feat as she was up against the Goliath of the province – the Ecleo's, the media compared the electoral bout to the face-off between David-Goliath. With her young political career and the Ecleo's political dynasty, which can be traced back to the 60s, she knew that she had to fight against two types of dragon – the political clout and influence of the Ecleo's, and the poverty of the people. While the media was only speaking about the political opposition, she was hoping that she could also slay poverty and bring the people in the province out from the cycle of poverty and marginalization.

To better contextualize the kind of opposition that she had to brace with in 2013, eight Ecleos were in the position of power in the province. The wife of Ruben Sr., Glenda Ecleo, was the governor, and his daughter, Geraldine Ecleo-Villaroman was the vice governor. Three of Ruben Sr.'s children were mayors of the Municipalities of Dinagat, Basilisa, and San Jose. The Vice Mayor of Cagdiano and two SB members of San Jose were also Ecleos. Given this political landscape, the seeming invincibility of the Ecleo family, however, did not prevent her from making a bold stance to contest a position in Dinagat. In 2013 elections, she won the Congressional

seat against Vice-Governor Gwendolyn Ecleo with a lead of more than 3,000 votes. The fight was definitely not easy and she shared that she kept her full trust with the voters' capacity to be discerning enough to know the difference between her brand of leadership and the Ecleos'. In the short period as caretaker of Dinagat District, she demonstrated a principled political stance: she translated projects and programs into realities, which were almost unheard of or unthinkable under the regime of the powerful political dynasty in the province.

It is also interesting to note that she had a number of PBMA members supporting her candidacy who believe in her brand of leadership and governance in the province. Some of these members expressed that it was also through the scholarships, which she made available for the people in the province that their sons and daughters were given the rare chance of studying in a college or university.

Resistance and Collaboration. In the 2013 elections, she was not spared from attacks and challenges. She, however, was firm in her conviction and principles in trusting the people's capacity to use their votes wisely. She is aware that she may also partially fit into the image of patronage politics through scholarships, medical assistance, burial assistance, etc. as long as the programs and projects will benefit her constituency.

When asked how she evaluates the political landscape in the province, she considers the Dinagat as a microcosm of Philippine politics. In reference to women politicians, for instance, she admits that there are benchwarmers or fillers when the husbands, fathers, brothers or sons have completed the maximum allowable terms for public servants. She further explained that woman politicians most often saw the need to take on the "*macho/masculine traits for them to be taken seriously — matapang, kayang patawag kahit sino, mataray, bossing, o minsan nanununtok.*" The same trend can also be seen within the Philippine Congress that continues to be an "old boys club". Women representatives who are usually wives, daughters, sisters, and mothers of the congressman who have completed their terms occupy only less than a third of Philippine Congress. In some instances, the presence of the husband remains visible as he still performs negotiation processes with the agencies and at times, even makes the decisions.

In Congress, she also saw the need to engage male representatives in pushing for the passage of progressive legislations such as anti-discrimination bill, HIV-AIDS, divorce, and amendments to the Family Code that are discriminatory to women. For her, she has realized that an adversarial stance will never be effective inside Congress. In her work experience, she realized that it was important to make the Congressmen feel that they can be advocates and allies too. One strategy that she employs

is not to question them or show judgment. She used their language and take part in some their gatherings during breaks from sessions to interact with them. Joining them for smoke has been one of her strategies to engage the congressmen in serious discussions. She knows how important it is to make them understand the context of her advocacies, she reminds them that they have a role in women's empowerment, and that they are not the enemies. In many instances, the strategy was effective as she was able to convince them to support her legislative agenda. In pushing for gender related bills, she, however, noted that the party list representatives affiliated with religious groups can be the most vocal opposition. This is something, which she witnessed in the passage of the Reproductive Health Law, as a case in point. Thus, she clarified that in controversial bills, membership in the same political party does not always guarantee votes.

In local politics, patronage remains a masculine practice. Being sensitive to such issues, she has always tried to redefine politics in Dinagat. She cites a case to explain how politics can be redefined – in handling requests for medical assistance, she partnered with hospitals in Surigao to help accommodate the medical needs of her constituents instead of handing over money to address medical bills. Through this arrangement, it becomes clear to the constituents of Dinagat what type of assistance their municipality can provide when medical concerns and emergencies arise. The necessary provisions such as hospital services also gradually replace the role of money when one talks of government services. Another way to redefine patronage politics is through scholarships specifically for tertiary education. Deserving students are selected and awarded with the scholarship. This program spelled a big change for the youth of Dinagat who were mostly highschool graduates. In handing the scholarships, however, she takes advantage of the situation in reminding the students of the government's role in building communities and societies, and that it is the government's task to provide basic services such as education and livelihood opportunities.

She knew that it would be difficult to make the students see relation the scholarships and other programs of the government within the human rights frame especially that most of these students and their families continually feel the pressure of making ends meet. To first address the lack of jobs, and skills, she partnered with relevant agencies to help assist her constituents gain skills, and eventually work opportunities. She specifically worked with TESDA, the Department of Science and Technology (DOST), and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). Despite the number of programs provided to the municipalities in Dinagat – with her understanding the complexity of the problems of the people,

she knows that the delivery of such services will not be enough. For her, what is equally crucial is for the people to really understand the role of the government and that the various forms of assistance are not her personal contributions. The same point applies to the programs of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and Department of Health (DOH). She stressed the importance of letting the people know that as their representative in Congress, she is the one responsible in ensuring that the government provides the expected and necessary assistance to the people of Dinagat.

In her other collaborative efforts, she also tries to find a way to include gender inclusive spaces in the construction of buildings in the province. In working with the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), for instance, she negotiates with the agency the inclusion of gender-neutral toilet facilities in government buildings. Such feature of the building, in turn, can be considered as a distinctive aspect of the buildings within her term.

With regard to traditional projects associated with politicians, she acknowledges the importance of covered courts, and multipurpose halls in communities. In the far-flung areas, for example, covered courts can function as place of refuge in typhoon seasons. Realizing that projects of such kinds have become symbols of government presence, she builds on its symbolic meanings, but provides her own twist to the traditional symbol by ensuring that the people are consulted and that they are the ones who identify the projects, which the community needs. Revealing her long work and experience with marginalized communities, she upholds participatory frameworks in the crafting and implementation of projects and programs in the province.

Making Women Visible. She considers the welfare of women as an important part of her priority agenda. In the bills that she proposed in Congress, she made sure that women can benefit from the bill and that women's issues can be addressed.

The urgency of women's issues can be recognized in her close, working relation with Gender and Development (GAD) focal point persons in the various agencies implementing her programs and projects. The stress on GAD focal point system is one reason why women in the province have access to health services, particularly reproductive health services which include pre-natal, birthing assistance, family planning options, etc. Young women are also included in youth leadership programs in the province on top of the scholarship programs. In helping women fulfill their potentials, she also partnered with women cooperatives for livelihood programs. The 4Ps parent leaders, as an example, have organized themselves and started

catering services in the municipality as a way of augmenting their family income. But beyond provisions, she recognized the need to encourage women to actively participate in barangay assemblies. For her, it is crucial that women feel that they have a huge role to perform in the development of Dinagat.

In highlighting the role of women, she once objected to a Commission on Higher Education (CHED) memo preventing double enrolment per family. She knew that with the culturally assigned gender roles, young women in families will take the back seat and the family will prioritize male siblings to finish schooling. When the memo was released, she immediately knew of its impact to women, and that young girls will be further displaced. After her objection, CHED changed its rule and allowed double enrolment of scholars per family.

Empowering Future Women Leaders. She saw the need of empowering future women leaders through capacity building focusing on development of skills, competency, and instilling in them the right attitude especially when confronted with challenging circumstances. In training these future leaders, a key concern is to break traditional political practices such as patronage and its perverse appropriation of the concept of *utang na loob*. In this respect, she underscores the need to instill among her constituents that they should claim the services and programs that are supposed to be provided and implemented by their government officials. She clarified that the services and programs are to be expected, hence demanded from the elected officials. There being in the position does not mean that the constituents in a municipality, for instance, owe something to the public officials. On the contrary, it should be the other way around. This is a crucial point, which future women leaders should know. Political power, on such note, means service and the privileging of public interest.

In the course of her political career, she acknowledged the struggles and obstacles in her political journey. But she knows that Akbayan has prepared her well to face such challenges. She adds that Akbayan also keeps her grounded and allows her to maintain a critical stance to issues, and bills proposed by legislators in Congress. But despite her accomplishments, she specifies that the political party treats her as an ordinary member and not a congresswoman. She values such aspect of her relation with the other members of the political party, since it reminds her of the temporary nature of her work and reminds her of the possibility of going back to her first love, which is to serve as public interest lawyer.

Framing the Woman Politician. The narratives intersect in their perspective that the people in Dinagat have been habituated into the sensibilities of patronage politics. This is reflected in their assessment of the people's view of the government as an institution that prioritizes friends, and family members over public service. Conditioned by this analysis, this group of women politicians considers it their task to challenge and help change such point of view. Consequently, these politicians frame themselves as anti-thetical to the more dominant style of leadership and governance in Dinagat. This is how these women politicians frame their brand of leadership in the province.

By considering themselves oppositional to traditional politicians, the vice-mayor, for instance, see poverty as the consequence of non-participatory modes of governance in the local government. This is one reason why she sees to it that projects are properly implemented, and that the target recipients benefit, and are consulted as her way of assessing the quality of the programs and projects. The consultative approach is a stance which they also underscore. More to the point, this consultative approach is the brand of leadership they wish to bring in Dinagat. In wanting to provide a space for the communities' voice, they insist their constituents to articulate their concerns, and criticisms. While the remarks can be difficult to manage at times, they see its positive aspect by recognizing such types of conversation as the people's assertion and expression of their right to demand results from the people they elected into a post. This critical assessment of the situation springs from a principle that the people of the province can see beyond patronage politics and gradually unlearn its habits.

The mayor of Loreto also finds wisdom in forcing her principles into the minds and heart of her constituents. When she goes against the people's view of politicians celebrating their birthdays, for instance, the decision may be regarded as a simple gesture of protest to the prevalence of dole-out sponsored activities named after politicians. By insisting on simple celebrations within her residence, what she achieves is she is able to make use of her humble celebration as critique to certain political and cultural practices in their town. As she made clear in her narratives, she has received negative comments from her constituents from the practice, which she, however, considers part of the difficult process of making the people realize that they need to unlearn counter-productive expectations from their politicians.

With the anti-thetical stance of the women politicians, the kind of political leadership that these women politicians promote and uphold can be interpreted as assertions of the Foucauldian (1967) concept of

discontinuity. This philosophical notion stands for cracks or gaps that seek to diverge from the usual and expected positions. Comparable to the way these women politicians confront traditional politics, they make conscious and committed efforts to open enabling and empowering spaces that will forcibly disrupt the way politics have been construed and imagined by the people of Dinagat. True to Foucault's notion of discontinuities, even small opportunities for change are given highest premium and are seriously considered as catalysts for critical thoughts and queries.

Their principle on the categorical refusal to use the traditional vote buying, giving out cash to voters in exchange for their votes in times of election is a good case in point. Knowing how people in the province become excited at the thought that their politicians will release truckloads of money during electoral campaigns, the imperative to avoid such pattern of behavior functions as the substance of their political platform. This disruption in expectation is a position, which the other women politician's accounts also enthusiastically shared in their narratives. This is why they also contribute in a concerted effort to lead the people away from the veils of false promises and lofty ambitions that cannot be backed-up by concrete programs and resolutions. In the vice-mayor's narrative, for instance, she has been converted into a believer when she won her first political post as barangay captain without the use and influence of money. Her victory convinced her that the people of Dinagat can make critical and good choices if they are given spaces of discontinuities or spaces where they are disposed to think, raise questions, and protected from intimidating machineries, thereby motivating them to actively participate as dialogical partners in the electoral processes. This means that women in Dinagat have become more open in discussing these with women leaders because they perceive and feel that these leaders are more open and can understand and appreciate these issues the same way they do.

Political Tactics and Strategies. Another thematic feature in their narratives that exemplifies Foucault's (1967) concept of discontinuity is their commitment to college or university education as shown in the substantial increase of scholars in the province. Recognizing the potentials of the youth in Dinagat, and the empowering effect of college degrees for the families in the province, these women politicians agree that scholarships may eventually break the cycle of poverty in many of the families in Dinagat. A sample positive effect of the program is the dwindling interest among teen-age girls to work as house helpers in Surigao City. In turn, the girls in the province already look forward to studying in universities and colleges in nearby cities. These girls see the kind of opportunities that college degrees can open-up or facilitate, which they would like to take advantage

of. From a politician's point of view, the shift in interest to education is already a significant achievement in letting the people in Dinagat realize that they deserve better conditions than what they currently have.

The staunch advocacy for more college or university graduates from Dinagat is part of the concerted political strategy of the interviewed women politicians. In contrast to short-term programs, these women politicians think of the long-term scenario in the province if the majority of its youth remain satisfied with their high-school diplomas. By capacitating the young to aspire for better conditions, this political strategy recognizes the people as the heart of real development. In turn, the families of these scholars are also inspired and challenged to do their part to ensure that they can also be of help in bringing their children closer to their dreams. This is what these women politicians also imagine as a new way of configuring the political landscape in the province. With more community members armed with college degrees, and families convinced of the importance of education, the face of politics is substantially modified as traditional patronage politics would now need to compete with more critical and inquiring minds. This is a political strategy, which is recognized as crucial to the empowerment of the people.

Since education and scholarships help change people's lives, the opportunity creates a firm crack or gap in the way people regard their local politicians. This means that a discontinuity is occasioned given that the recipients of education and their families have now become included in the development project of the province. The scholarships, in such respect, act as the hinged to a newly found freedom from the influence and intimidation of traditional politics. This is the empowering instance that the women politicians want their constituents to experience. Convinced that the people in the province desire change, they consider it their task to magnify that desire and provide opportunities. This is the long-term perspective that guides many of their projects that highlight basic services such as access to health programs/assistance, roads, and other opportunities for learning and unlearning.

Hence, when these women politicians are asked on the kind of political tactic and strategy that employ, they all agree that a key strategy is to start convincing the people to see and regard the government as an ally to their development, and not as a machinery institution that takes advantage of their poverty and limitations. Using Foucault's notion, such political approach lives up to the expected struggle and discomfort from a situation that seeks to depart from traditional politics to a more participatory-grounded type of government and leadership. Recognizing the hard work needed in the locale of discontinuity, the women politicians

continuously discuss among themselves and their partners how to communicate the message to the people in Dinagat. Also, mindful of the role and influence of the people – like their staff with whom they closely work and collaborate, these women politicians always consider it their task to make them understand the emancipative and enabling platform that they aspire for the province as a whole. More to the point, this is done through a collective action of women leaders who shared the same vision/s in resisting the traditional male/macho politics practices.

Imagined Future for Women. As women politicians, part of their vision is to have more women politicians in Dinagat Islands occupying vital positions and forming networks of relations. This cooperative and communal stance is a situation that they hope for in the province. It is also the same communal spirit that they try to make the most of as they support each other and coordinate each other's plans and programs. By trying to live up to the vision, this question, however remains: Why do we need to imagine more women politicians?

They are convinced that women accord special attention to the fundamental needs of families and communities such as water, electricity and hospitals. A woman's concern for basic needs is a perspective, which they highlight. In disaster preparedness programs, for instance, she reckons that the special attention for detail in the household space and community is crucial in ensuring that programs are sensitive to the needs of women and children. For them, this natural inclination to uphold the over-all wellbeing of family and community members almost guarantees the strategic contribution of women politicians in the province with disaster preparedness as a case in point. As they has narrated, projects and programs of women politicians in Dinagat Islands cover mostly projects – like scholarship programs, medical assistance to indigent patients in government hospitals, livelihood support programs, the purchase of IT equipment and financial assistance to local governments for its priority projects and programs.

Their empowered stance may also serve as protest to the marginal role of women in Philippine politics. Making use of Foucault's (1988) technologies of the self, for instance, shows that the presence of this critical pool of women politicians mean that there is a need to counter spaces that marginalize the presence of women. If the seats in the government will remain exclusive to gender, class and religion, then the anti-thetical posture would need to demonstrate and explain the ill effects of non-intersectionality in institutions. The symbolism of complexity and plurality will condition the opposing side of a standoff against homogenizing tendencies in the realm of politics where nepotism and bribery thrive. This

is where the presence of women politicians is called to intervene. This is also where their reflection on the role of counter symbols such as concrete roads and bridges as discursive platforms where the constituents of the province are disposed, if not forced to critically reconsider their habits in times of election.

CONCLUSION

The Case of the Counterfactuals. The narratives of the women politicians interviewed in the Dinagat Islands and Foucault's concept of discontinuities (1967) and technologies of the self (1988), argues for the presence of counterfactuals as possible critique to the benchwarmer phenomenon among women politicians in the country. More to the point, the narratives and thematic analysis help ethnographically and discursively characterize the counterfactual as conceptual and practical phenomenon that demonstrates the following features:

(a) The combined strategic deployment of resistance and collaboration as a way of maneuvering within a male dominated and traditional political landscape in order to contend for political positions, deal with issues, and uphold participatory-grounded principles. Guided by Foucault's notions, to resist means to create spaces of discontinuities where the people are given the opportunity to re-think or evaluate their political habits, postures and expectations. This means that a counterfactual is keen on creating and cultivating such spaces to help re-claim the dignity in people's votes, the electoral posts, and the government as a social institution. Moreover, to collaborate implies seeing the potential to ally with individuals who can support proposed projects and eventually take part in advocacies. This collaborative spirit is also guided by a critical stance, which acts as built-in defense from insinuations and intimidations that may spring from traditional habits in patronage politics. This is where the notion of technologies of the self also comes to life. In relation to the narratives in this study, they all participate in the balancing act between resistance and collaboration, or between discontinuities and technologies of the self. It is this crucial interplay that also conditions their vision, projects and dealings with the people of Dinagat Islands.

(b) Traditional politics is an issue that counterfactuals recognize and try to challenge. Despite its pervasive and regulative nature, a counterfactual's narrative stands as a critique to the dominant structure and proposes that one of the best ways to oppose its dominance is to work within its own terrain. This means that political posts are seen as locations where the critique to patronage politics can be done, and even magnified.

By propagating projects such as roads, bridges and hospitals, the people are disposed to regain their connection with the government, and are asked to reflect on how the government becomes productive if the right people are put into office. This effort to work-in the enemies' lair, so to speak, also springs from a realization that if more women politicians work together to change the lives of its people, trekking such path will be less difficult.

(c) For women politicians who entered politics via traditional pathways, a counterfactual unfolds when the politician herself decides to abandon key sources of power in patronage politics such as money, intimidation through violence, false promises and even abandoning forms of social capital for those coming from dynastic family. This cleansing exercise may take place especially if the politician decides to act on the dissatisfactions emerging from mediocre or sub-standard types of public service of the government. Upon reaching such flashpoint, a counterfactual decides to abandon such habits and looks forward to work with fellow politicians who desire to provide real and empowering development. This networking mind-set with like-minded yet critical people is a counterfactual's refuge and source of strength especially in navigating through the pit-falls and trappings in bureaucratic processes.

(d) Given the intent to reconfigure the way traditional politics impresses itself on people's lives, history and imaginings, counterfactuals are, therefore, motivated to carve their own political identities. This effort to create such identity has become crucial especially in challenging symbols of repression and domination. Building on their discourse on symbols, the challenge is to create new symbols of hope of inclusive development. Since symbols can subvert values and even colonize the imagination, creating an alternative symbol requires sustained and communal effort. This is one locale of power where the significance and meaning of the counterfactual necessarily figures.

(e) Finally, a counterfactual envisions more women political leaders in the government. Recognizing the value of women's perspective and experiences, the next generation of women leaders must be prepared, challenged and nourished. Having a community of women politicians who also prioritize women's agenda is a possibility, which counterfactuals feel that they have a responsibility with. This is how such vision interweaves the past, present and future of women political leaders in the country. This is also one reason why the key informants in this study took the risk in creating more symbols for empowered and socially grounded women in the Dinagat Islands.

Presented with these features, what these women political leaders in Dinagat Islands have contributed to the women development agenda

is to propose – through their life stories and works, possible constitutive elements to the concept of counterfactuals to the benchwarmer phenomenon. It is this type of contribution that sets them apart from other forms of contribution in pushing for women's political participation and representation, and sets them in consonance with the known and unknown efforts done by women politicians who eye for women's substantive participation in society's decision-making processes as pointed out by Agarwal (2001) and by confronting the structural and cultural constraints as stressed by Sobritchea (in press).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Pursuing the following subsequent courses of actions may enrich this study's insights and scope:

(1) Given that the study is confined to the Dinagat Islands, a similar study can be done in other areas in Mindanao where possible women politicians who are counterfactuals to the benchwarmer phenomenon subsist. This possibility also serves as an opportunity to discover other ways of configuring the conceptual and practical features of counterfactuals;

(2) Another possible study is to ethnographically describe the implications of projects of women politicians who can be considered part of the counterfactual bandwagon. In so doing, the impact of such projects on the lives of women, children and men can be described in detail;

(3) The life stories of IP women and Muslim women who have become politicians may be explored, since such narratives importantly figure and shape the narratives of Mindanao Politics as a whole;

(4) The gathered narratives may also present opportunities to reconstruct the history of women's struggles in other regions in Mindanao offering new ideas and insights on how women figure in key struggles that took place in the island; and

(5) Closely look at how women leaders from dynastic family deviate from patronage politics towards progressive politics, which includes how they re-brand themselves away from their fathers and brothers.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 : Map of the Province of Dinagat Islands



Accessed on April 7, 2017, [https://www.google.com/search?q=province+of+dinagat+islands+](https://www.google.com/search?q=province+of+dinagat+islands)



Accessed on April 7, 2017, <https://www.google.com/search?q=province+of+dinagat>

Appendix 2 : Comparative Statistics of Candidates by Sex from 1998 to 2013

YEAR	NO. OF SEATS	TOTAL NO. OF CANDIDATES	MALE	%	FEMALE	%
1998	17,512	63,531	54,454	85.71	9,077	14.29
2001	17,623	52,408	44,332	84.59	8,076	15.40
2004	17,713	50,160	42,705	85.14	7,455	14.86
2007	17,887	46,211	38,787	83.93	7,424	16.07
2010	17,996	50,268	41,741	83.04	8,340	16.60
2013	18,054	44,449	36,401	81.89	7,925	17.82

Source: (comelec.gov.ph, 2015)

Appendix 3 : Percentage of Elected Officials in the Philippines in Election Years: 1998, 2004, 2010 and 2013

ELECTION YEAR	WOMEN (%)	MEN (%)
1998	16.15	83.85
2004	16.63	83.37
2010	18.56	81.44
2013	19.92	79.75

Source: COMELEC

Appendix 4 : Statistical Data per Elective Position by Sex during the last May 2013 Elections (comelec.gov.ph, 2015)

ELECTIVE POSITION	NO. OF SEATS	TOTAL NO. OF CANDIDATES	MALE	%	FEMALE	%
Philippines	18,054	44,449	36,401	81.89	7,925	17.82
Senator	12	33	25	75.75	8	24.25
Congress District Representative	234	630	505	80.15	125	19.84
Party List	58	123				
Governor	80	202	167	82.68	35	17.32
Vice Governor	80	191	165	86.38	26	13.61
Board Member	766	1,755	1,483	84.5	272	15.5
City Mayor	143	377	313	83	64	17
City Vice-Mayor	143	355	304	85.63	51	14.37
City Councilor	1,598	4,031	3,308	82.06	723	17.94
Municipal Mayor	1,491	3,517	2,830	80.47	687	19.53
Municipal Vice-Mayor	1,491	3,946	3,339	84.62	607	15.38

ELECTIVE POSITION	NO. OF SEATS	TOTAL NO. OF CANDIDATES	MALE	%	FEMALE	%
Municipal Councilor	11,932	29,673	24,308	81.92	5,365	18.08
ARRM Governor	1	6	4	66.67	2	33.33
ARRM Vice Governor	1	8	8	100	0	0

Appendix 5 : International Declarations and National Legal Instruments

INTERNATIONAL DECLARATIONS	NATIONAL LEGAL INSTRUMENTS
Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)	1987 Philippine Constitution
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)	RA 7192 or the Women in Development and Nation-Building Act of 1992
Convention on the Political Rights of Women by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)	RA 7160: An Act Providing for a Local Government Code of 1991
Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)	Republic Act 9710 or the Magna Carta of Women