

A Life Dedicated to Public Service: The Lady L Story

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Abstract-*This study featured how a lady local politician rose to power as a barangay captain. It aimed to: describe her leadership orientation before she became a barangay captain, analyze the factors of her success stories in political leadership, extrapolate her values based on the problems/challenges met in the barangay, unveil her initiatives to address these problems, and interpolate her enduring vision for the future of the barangay. Through a biographical research design, with purposive sampling, a key female informant named as Lady L was chosen with the sole criteria of being a female Barangay Captain of Cebu City. Interview guides were utilized in the generation of Lady L's biographic information about her political career. Lady L's experiences in waiting for the perfect time and working in the private sector destined her to have a successful political career enhanced with passion and family influence. Encountering problems concerning basic education and unwanted migrants in Barangay K did not discourage her choice to run for re-election, because of her dedication to public service. Her ways to reach out and collaborate with welfare groups mitigate the problems of parental neglect and informal settlers in her barangay. The story of Lady L implies that in Cebu City, issues arise as a result of the practice of partisan politics, gender issues have minor bearing, and she envisioned a healthy and well-educated barangay, with an improved wellness and child care development.*

Keywords: *women empowerment, public service, biography*

INTRODUCTION

As a result of social conditioning, masculine capacities have always overshadowed the strengths and abilities of women since time immemorial. Femininity has always been seen as a subject of domesticity (i.e. child conception and marital and household reliabilities), a shadow of a deeply rooted system of patriarchy. Our perception of both men and women has long been shaped by society [1]. Sexism constantly reminds us that both males and females have been socialized and born with the capability to accept thoughts that categorize men into the labor force, and women into the domestic sphere, in a classic segregation of gender. Both men and women are born with a certain destined purpose to fulfill, a result of said social conditioning [2]. Men and women are expected to act differently [1]. For evident examples, men have always been popular for labored work and women are known to be family domesticated.

The vision of women leading domestic lives continue to dominate the imagination of the common people because the image of women have been tainted by the long-running stereotype that men are the breadwinners and the women make the bread, to be expected as a perfect homemaker and child nurturer. This stereotype is one of the many motivations that stimulate the women to lobby empowerment. However, this stereotype, which may also be known as gender roles, has slowly disintegrated, not because of a female revolution, but because of the realization of women's potential and the acknowledgment of their past, present and future contributions. It has also been realized that women have been trained and/or have a natural instinct to handle roles that are associated with men (i.e. positions in the government). Not only are women able to manage jobs that are pioneered by men, they have also been excelling at jobs that are made only for men to begin with (i.e. marine engineers and seafarers). It is known that women are

likely to be more concerned about problems that target the community as a whole. However, in order for these problems to be put on the political agenda, it seems that a critical mass of women is needed for them to be pushed through [3], in order to become empowered.

Women comprise more than half of the world's population, and still they remain to be under-represented in government offices, political leadership posts and as well as voters. If women continue to be under-represented, then democracy cannot be truly expressed considering more half of the world's population is not well represented in the field of politics. Not until 1970s that women in the world are given the right to suffrage and eventually allowed to vote [4]. The ratio of men and women's participation in public life continues to be in favor of men in general. However, significant progress has been constituted for opportunities in politics to be made available for women [5].

Western countries have already recognized women as an essential character in politics. With Hillary Clinton and Queen Elizabeth II being key components to their respective country's political banner, Eastern states have no candidates to boast, because women from the East, where the Philippines is situated, are not as empowered. Also, a less popular fact about female politicians in significant studies is that there is a correlation between proportion of women in government and a lower level of corruption at the local and national level. Therefore, they are perceived to be less corrupt [3].

In Philippine historical books, there are only minimal mentions of Filipino women. Most, if not all, of our national heroes are male, except for a limited few like Teresa Magbanua (the Joan of Arc in the Visayas), Melchora Aquino or locally known as TandangSora. Strikingly, there only have been two out of fifteen heads of states in the Philippines who are female [6], the late Corazon "Cory" Aquino and the former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

The Philippines is generally more fortunate compared to its neighboring states for it has already appointed two female presidents. However, numerous women still face prejudices in acquiring positions in politics. The deprivation of women's rights to equal opportunities is caused by the country's lack of economic power [7].

The Barangay captain (village chief) serves as the most powerful government official of the Philippines in terms of power and function because he or she has

the capacity to exercise the executive, legislative and judiciary functions altogether. In 2010, there are only 10 barangays in Cebu city, which have a female barangay captain and the number increased by six in 2013.

The barangay is the basic unit in the government of the Philippines. Even today, the term 'barangay' is believed to be originally meant as a 'family', consisting of husband, wife and parents; brothers, sisters, siblings and children [8]. When several of these families are grouped, a village is formed with one recognized father or mother, known as the barangay captain. Through this study, the desire to catch a glimpse of the community in its most modest setting is a major concern. While, Cebu is actively involved in the gender and development activities through the local government units, still there are not enough records of existing researches regarding women Cebuano local politicians, thus the study is desired.

Lady L, is chosen as the subject in the study because out of 16 lady barangay captains who are filtered in the ranking, Lady L is unique ways of managing her barangay is observed with unique and tangible leadership, aside from being a typical mother and a loving wife.

Review of Literature

According to Madeleine Albright, countries "deserve to have the best possible leader" and in that sense, women should be given opportunities to showcase their talent in the political sphere; and if not, such countries would be depriving themselves of the chance to have one [9].

The field of politics and public policy is probably one of the workplaces where it is obvious that women are most clearly outnumbered by men [10]. Women's limited access to power-yielding resources notably affects their participation in the decision-making processes of the government [7]. Systematic studies show that female politicians are more likely to focus on issues that matter more to women and the community like operating daycare centers, promoting gender equality, fighting for reproductive rights, maintenance of elderly and children's welfare [3]. Modern democratic societies aim to achieve equality for both men and women among their members in terms of status and gender equality and must be promoted in all phases of life [9].

In order for women's general interests to be embodied into governance, it is important to include

their participation in the decision-making process. Women's active involvement in domestic and community work makes them apprehensive of the genuine issues that are faced by the majority, especially those on the grassroots [11]. The inclusion of women in local government serves as a positive provocation for other women to enter into politics and open the door to fracture the stereotypes of the role of women in society and public policy [12].

"Women in public life are dubbed as a key in encouraging other women to not only stand for public office, but also take a real interest in political decision-making," says Siobhan Corria [13]. Women are entitled to change the structure of society and to find ways to eliminate gender discrimination and subordination because these are issues that target them the most. Women are more likely to initiate change and influence others to become gender sensitive [1]. Women in the local government unit are being placed in a unique position to address challenges faced by females when they are actively involved in community work and women's movement. On a fascinating note, women politicians are usually perceived to be more caring and are shown to work harder for their members compared to their male counterparts [14]. Given women's experience in discrimination and stereotyping, female leaders are expected to exert double the effort to present their ideas [1].

The Women in the Philippines

In the Philippines, the ideology of domesticity has been a part of the culture-bound orientation of patriarchal ideology, an Oriental concept of women subordination, and has been continued among our previous Spanish and American colonizers, when they take away women's religious power in the colonial period [15].

To state an example is a typical Filipino family that consists of a father, a mother and their children. Obviously, the father is the head of the household; however, important decisions for the whole family are not solely dependent upon him. The mother, his wife, also has a say in the matters that concern the family like family expenses [16]. But because of social structure, the mother or wife is labelled only as the light of the family and the custodian of the children. The naturally patriarchal community in our country subjects most women into positions with lesser power and prestige [17].

Unlike most Western countries, Filipino women have already acquired high positions in society during the pre-Spanish period and further escalated under the Spanish rule, not discounting the role of the *babaylans*, in Mounts Banahaw and Kanla-on, and in some other areas of the archipelago, they act as local shamans who protect the entire village from harm. Filipino women's limitations to receive education are compensated by their concession to engage in business [16].

However, during the colonial period, Filipino women suffer from the close-mindedness of the Westerners. Their full potentials are not recognized because they are restricted by the idealistic impressions of the Westerners. If Europeans and Americans would have noted the distinct characteristics of the Filipino women, they would have witnessed the successors and descendants of Gabriela Silang, Melchora Aquino, Gregoria de Jesus and Basilia Tiongson [18], who are distinguished women in Philippine history.

The peak of the People Power Revolution in 1986 paves the way to the creation of a more liberated and nuanced Philippine Constitution. One of the key elements of the 1987 Constitution is gender equality which is magnified in Section 14 of Article II stating that, "The state recognizes the role of women in nation-building and shall ensure the fundamental equality before the law of women and men" [7]. At present, Filipino women exercise more rights than most women in other parts of Asia. Because their legacy is highly valued, their civil rights are recognized by the state [19].

The Women in Cebu

Cebuano women are not only robustly influence in the home, but also visibly present in the community [20]. Board Resolution Number 4236-2005 dubs as "The Code of Women in Cebu" is crafted, under the able leadership of Vice Governor Agnes Almendras-Magpale, in order to recognize protection of the rights and dignity of women in Cebu. Enumerable number of Cebuano women is elected in public office, as a congresswoman, governor, mayor, councilor, and a barangay captain.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study featured how a lady local politician rose to power as a barangay captain. It sought to answer the following objectives: (1) describe her leadership orientation before she became a barangay captain, (2)

analyze the factors of her success stories in political leadership, (3) extrapolate her values based on the problems/challenges met in the barangay, (4) unveil her initiatives to address these problems, and (5) interpolate her enduring vision for the future of the barangay.

METHODS

Research Design

This is a biographical research design, which looks into the life of a female barangay captain christens as “Lady L”. According to Roberts, biographical research is a specific type of qualitative research “which uses stories of individuals and other ‘personal materials’ to understand her life within its social context” [9]. Lady L, as the key subject of this study was chosen through purposive sampling. She was selected with the sole criterion of being a female barangay captain of Cebu City. Further considering a subject, whose position operates for legislative, executive and judiciary functions, sifting a list of eighty Barangay Captains in Cebu City, was initiated. After coming up with a filtered list of sixteen female Barangay Captains, their profiles were perused and screened. The selection of Lady L was based on the following criteria, which other lady barangay captains did not possess, (1) the number of years in government services, (2) a successful mother and a wife, (3) handling the most crowded barangay in the city, and (4) a charismatic leadership, which constituents admired. With these criteria, Lady L was being the most qualified candidate amongst the rest, a decision was finally selected the incumbent Lady L of Barangay K, as the subject’s name was deemed clandestine upon her request.

Research Tools

The interview guide was formulated and approved by two Social Science professors, who served as experts for validation. This guide was used during the formal interview. The conversation was recorded through a cellular phone. Using a laptop computer, the interview was then transcribed from Visayan dialect to English.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Success Stories

Lady L is a 44 year old politician who is duly elected as Barangay Captain of Barangay K, a native

of this aforementioned barangay, born into a family that is not affiliated with politics. Lady L goes to Zapatera Elementary School for her primary education from 1979-1985, Abellana National High School for her secondary education from 1985-1999. She then pursues Secretarial Vocational Courses at the University of San Jose-Recoletos from 1990-1993, and later proceeds to work at a private establishment for seven years before entering into politics.

Destined Political Future: A Confluence of Passion and Influence

As a child, Lady L has always eyed for a position in the community. She never becomes a politician, if not, through the influence of her in-laws, but because of her passion for public service. She first aims for electoral positions in the classroom. Although she does not win, she knows she is destined for a larger scale of constituents, in the future. Political leadership is a product of an individual passion to lead, which an intrinsic factor of a leader to chart for his or her political direction. To Lafferty, passion has been a competitive advantage [21], in doing business and in leadership. However, other extrinsic factors like family influence can mutually support in the achievement of Lady L’s desire to lead.

The Ripening of Time in Political Leadership

During her youth, she frequently follows the activities of the Kabataang Barangay or KB (now known as the Sangguniang Kabataan), an organization of village’s youth. Despite her persistence to be part of the KB, she is unable to run for a position when given the opportunity because at that time, she is married to Mr. A, who is then, a family of politicians, and has her first born child. Having been barred from running for a position in the Kabataang Barangay, she goes on to work at a private establishment.

She becomes a Barangay worker for two years, owing to her father-in-law, then the incumbent Barangay Captain, her work as a Barangay employee. During her years as a Barangay worker, Lady L is also affiliated with the Cebu City Women’s Association as the Vice President.

She is thirty years old when she becomes a Barangay Councilor for three consecutive terms (2002-2007; 2007-2010; and 2010-2013). However, unlike normal circumstances where three terms adds up to nine years, Lady L is in the position for eleven years when the Arroyo Administration postponed the elections, making Lady L’s first term as a Barangay

Councilor a five-year term (2002-2007). Authentic leadership is measured by the ripening of time. This means that Lady L's experiences in working in the private sector and her affiliation with women's organization shape her leadership for public office. Corollary to Lady L's passion in the national level, Senator Pia Cayetano, at present, puts her passion on promoting women's empowerment, by sponsoring various bills that support her advocacy for women [21].

Invaluable Dedication to Public Service

With her dedication and heart for service, she has decided to pursue a higher position after her three terms as a Barangay Councilor. In the year 2013, Lady L decides to run for Barangay captain with her husband's uncle as her opposition, which she has won. At present, she is one of sixteen female barangay captains out of eighty in Cebu City.

Challenges Met

On Parental Neglect

When asked about the problems she encountered in her barangay during her term, she highlights two major concerns: education and migrants. First, Lady L narrated,

"Our barangay has faced many basic problems in education that especially targets young children, there seems to be very little support from parents. Education is very essential. Of course it is not our responsibility as Barangay Officials to take full care for their children. It is the responsibility of the parents to do so".

In addressing on the problem of children's education in the barangay, barangay officials and parents work hand in hand for children's benefit. Lady L's barangay has the committee on education that takes care on the information of the parents regarding their responsibility to bring their children in school and to support them all the way. This is the value of **parental responsibility**.

On Informal Settlers

Lady L's barangay is in the busy and bustling metropolis, it can never be avoided that migrants from the rural areas find better opportunities in the city. However, most of them are not successful in their quest for a better life, because most of them have not earned a college degree. Their impoverished lives

resulted in living on the busy street corners, sidewalks, alleys, and river easements in an open space or in shanties.

"Another problem we have", Lady L says, "are the migrants who are not originally from Barangay K and yet decided to settle here. Most of them lay on the streets; so as a result, the streets become very crowded and dirty".

Lady L's view regarding this situation needs the collaboration of other sectors in the society to mitigate the prevalence of these aforementioned problems. The need for **mutual partnership** among the barangay officials and the barangay constituents needs further enhancement.

Interventions Initiated

Reaching out

To remedy the problems on basic education, Lady L said that:

"The Barangay disseminates information to the parents. However, we cannot compel them to cooperate if they do not wish to do so."

Reaching out is gushing forth of centric power of leadership to the marginalized sectors of the barangay in the aspect of providing better quality of education for all, without compulsion.

Collaborating with Welfare Groups

As a solution for the relocation of the migrants, Lady L said that:

"We let them leave (migrants). Especially those who lie on the sidewalks, we take away their sleeping materials so they won't return sleeping there again. Before, there was an Anti-Mendicancy Center that catered to giving them shelter but since it was ruined, they then left the City Center. The Barangay, with the help of the Department Of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), gave most of the migrants some money to be used as fare to go home".

Respecting of the Cebu City Ordinance No. 1631, known as the Anti-Mendicancy, is a sign of obedience of the state. In this ordinance, the migrants are oriented on its "Balik Probinsya" program of the city

government. However, the barangay, in coordination with the city government, needs to ask support from welfare groups more especially on the role of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) for assistance.

Future Plans

Wellness and Child Care Development

With the upcoming local and National elections, Lady L plans to be re-elected into office, by October 2016. Lady L currently has ongoing Projects for Barangay K, one of these is the Multi-purpose hall and if ever she is re-elected, she intends to continue the said project and plans to build a Sports Complex and a new Day Care Center for the Barangay.

Loyalty to Political Party Affiliation for Major Support

Posing a scenario, wherein, if given the chance to be re-elected under an administration headed by the opposing party, will this cause problems to her barangay management? According to Lady L,

“In terms of support, there might be a problem. That is why we are working very hard to let our Team win so that we will not encounter difficulties. I have long been in the government, ever since I have always been on Mayor A’s (incumbent mayor) side. When Mayor B (previous mayor) headed the administration, they barely give us any projects because we are only a small Barangay. He (previous mayor) is strict and discriminating. They (previous administration) prioritize bigger Barangays because from there he will also gain more voters”.

Undying Dedication to Public Service

Along with her direct experience in politics since her youth, she has gained a variety of views on politics and public service and has learned things that cannot be learned while in school. She is dedicated to her work as a public servant, a devoted mother of four and a faithful wife. Lady L balances family and career and she recognizes the frailty of the things that matters most.

CONCLUSION

Lady L, although not born into a family of politicians, successfully put herself into a high-level position in local government. Her experiences of

waiting for the perfect time and working in the private sector destined her to have a successful political career enhanced with passion and family influence. Lady L became a Barangay Councilor at the age of thirty and was elected into the office as the Barangay Captain at the age of forty-one. Encountering problems concerning basic education and unwanted migrants in Barangay K did not discourage her choice to run for re-election, because of her dedication to public service. Her ways to reach out and collaborate with welfare groups mitigate the problems of parental neglect and informal settlers in her barangay. The story of Lady L implies that in Cebu City, issues arise as a result of the practice of partisan politics, gender issues have minor bearing, and she envisioned a healthy and well-educated barangay, with an improved wellness and child care development.

RECOMMENDATION

Further research may be conducted for validation of gender issues, more especially met by lady government politicians. Documenting more other unique stories of female barangay captains in other towns and provinces of the Philippines will be desired to see comparability and contrast, as regards to the political governance of Lady L in the bustling metropolis in Cebu.

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