



## The Return of the Political: Chantal Mouffe and Ozamiz City Politics<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

*For nearly two decades, Ozamiz city was ruled by a political dynasty whose predatory politics has brought about the radical deficit of democracy in the state. Politics in the city is characterized with political harassments and violence. For three decades the ruling family succeeded in reformulating the democratic values of popular sovereignty and political antagonism in the city's democratic institutions, that they were able to rule the city without any threats of popular uprising and protestations. With their political machinery they were able to hostage the people of Ozamiz; often denying most of the citizens' freedom to insist on their fundamental democratic rights and entitlements. However, with the advent of the radical leadership exemplified by Chief Inspector Jovi Espenido, the fate of democracy in the city is changed from an authoritarian predatory system to a more open and democratic system. From a predatory state ruled by warlords and power predators to a liberal democratic state which embraces the fundamental democratic principles of liberty and equality. This paper intends to examine the state of politics of Ozamiz city following Chantal Mouffe's radical democratic paradigm. It aims to elucidate how Mouffe's antagonistic democracy fits to the state of politics in Ozamiz after the progressive leadership of Jovi Espenido was realized.*

**Keywords:** *Ozamiz city, Political dynasty, Chantal Mouffe, Radical Democracy, Warlords, Agonistic Pluralism*

### 1. Introduction

This paper intends to examine the nature of politics in Ozamiz city, seen through the lenses of Chantal Mouffe's "Agonistic Democracy". For decades Ozamiz was under the predatory rule of the Parojinog political dynasty whose incompetence of running a democratic society is exhibited in the state of economic development of the district which for many years and despite its strategic location remained to be a third class city, while the majority of the people are living in abject poverty. For many years the power predators of Ozamiz preyed on the district's weak and incoherent bureaucracy; they enriched themselves by milking on the city's resources while taking the city and the people of Ozamiz under hostage by means of political violence and intimidation. For almost 2 decades the Parojinogs, whose power-rule rests primarily from their

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immediate affiliation to the local mafia and their popular background, was able to flourish in their monopolistic rule by taking advantage of the country's predatory system of democracy.

For centuries the Philippines is suffering from democratic deficit caused primarily by the proliferation of national power-brokers and local warlords, who manipulate the country's politics and immure the people with fraudulence and political violence. They loot the country of its resources and divide among themselves the spoils, thereby enriching themselves while leaving the people in dire poverty and absolute misery. Elite-patrimonial democracy flourished in the Philippines due to its rootedness in the country's political narrative. The rise to power of local elites to becoming national oligarchs in modern Philippine democracy is traced during the Spanish colonization period; when the Spanish government introduced the *Principalia* which was the colonial aristocracy of the Spanish Philippines. It consisted of the *gobernadorcillo* who acted as the chief head of a particular municipality and whose power to rule encompassed that of the *cabezas de barangay* who were heads of the colonial villages. Together they ruled the districts they were appointed to oversee. They were the elites of the time who plundered the state of its resources and who enriched themselves by sharing the spoils available among themselves. They live in prosperity and wellbeing while the people who were under their supervisions are living in dire poverty.

Furthermore, when the Americans took over the country after the mock battle of Manila Bay in August 13, 1898, these colonial elites were given the same privileges by the new colonizers. The elite predatory system of governance proliferated by the Spaniards was not totally replaced, neither there was any intention of really exterminating the unjust system imposed by the country's first colonizers, rather it was simply transformed into a hybrid of crude feudalism and authoritarian democracy which resulted into an oligarchic-patrimonial democracy. The Americans succeeded in asserting and furthering their rule over the country with their introduction of their pseudo democratic institutions. It was a pseudo democracy that was designed to cater the local elites' hold of power over their districts with the intention of securing America's hold over these local caciques. Such democratic arrangement paved the way for the proliferation of elite democracy in Philippine politics. Democracy, in this regard, is empty of its



original sense of popular sovereignty. The ruling elites succeeded in reformulating, and to some extent eliminating, the fundamental democratic principle of popular sovereignty and replacing it with their own imposed rationality, that they were able to flourish without contestations from the people.

Deliberative democracy, for this matter, is exhibiting its fundamental limitation with its insistence of a universal rationality and consensus whereupon antagonism is cancelled out being a threat to the entire enterprise of liberal democracy. Chantal Mouffe argues that to insist for a universal consensus in a democracy is to eliminate the legitimacy of political antagonisms and contestations. Democracy must not aim for a universal consensus, rather it must allow for a conflictual consensus to transpire. This is for the reason that modern democratic societies are pluralistic in value, that is, it presupposes differences in the ethico-political bearings of each individual member that a presumed universal consensus cannot ignore. The country's democratic deficit is brought about by such limiting idea of deliberative democracy by its faulty representative system and by its predatory design of democratic governance. What is necessitated then is to reinstitute the political in Philippine politics by radicalizing democracy in the country. A radicalization that does not presuppose a new revolution from the outside, but rather from within; a revolution that puts into practice the fundamental principles of liberal democracy: equality and liberty.

## **2. Background**

The Philippines, it is often said, has a predatory system of democratic state and institutional arrangements. So that most of the prominent political theorists in the contemporary period, who venture into the study of Philippine democracy, argue that the country's political state is in dire need of serious reformulation and restructuring being in the state of political decadence. Paul Hutchcroft for that matter emphatically asserts that "Philippine democracy is, indeed, in a state of crisis."<sup>2</sup> This is despite of the fact that there is no other country in Asia that has more experience in running a democratic state other than the Philippines. Walden Bello

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Hutchcroft and Joel Rocamora, Strong Demands and Weak Institutions: The Origins and Evolution of the Democratic Deficit in the Philippines, *Journal of East Asian Studies* 3 (2003), 259.



further expresses that in the entire history of East Asia, the Philippines was the first nation to wage war for national liberation which eventually led to the establishment of the first republic in the region in 1898. The Philippines is likewise the first in the region to have embraced modern parliamentary democracy as its system of governance.<sup>3</sup> What Bello is conveying is that with the country's long years of experience in running a democratic society it should have perfected, by this time, the practice and the mobilization of the fundamental democratic principles of liberty and equality and must have already benefitted the poor members, yet what transpired in the present is actually the contradictory. Horrendous inequalities and unjust structural schemes proliferated over the years which serve the purpose of most self-serving and corrupt politicians, while most of the Filipino people remained poor. Hutchcroft and Joel Rocamora echoed the same sentiment saying that the Philippines is the only country in Asia which has more experience with democratic institutions. That over a century, from the Malolos republic to the political midwifery of the US colonial rule, from the cacique democracy to the restorative democracy in the post EDSA uprising of 1986, the Filipinos know what modern liberal democracy is, its benefits and shortcomings.<sup>4</sup> However, though the country has been democratic for over a century, the structure it embraces is undemocratic. Hutchcroft further asserts that the crisis in Philippine democracy is manifested, "in a deepening frustration over the inability of democratic institutions to deliver the goods, specifically goods of a public character."<sup>5</sup> This is because the country's democratic institutions are under the control and the manipulative schemes of self-serving politicians and landlords who loot the land of its resources and divide among themselves the spoils; thereby enriching themselves while leaving the people in dire state of existence. That is, while the country's democratic system is having problems of providing goods that are public in character; those in the favorable position, the elected public officials and the oligarchs, take advantage of the country's incoherent and often immature bureaucracy and milk the system for their own private welfare. Moreover, with the prevalent existence of power predators in Philippine democratic system, Hutchcroft refers to the country's state of democracy as

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<sup>3</sup> Walden Bello, *Sociology and the Centennial: Considerations on Democracy in the Philippines and South East Asia*, [Article Online], <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>, accessed on January 30, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Hutchcroft and Joel Rocamora, *Strong Demands and Weak Institution*, 259.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.



patrimonial/elite democracy. It is a weak state preyed by political power predators who act as bosses and warlords; who impose absolute political power and longevity over their subordinates; and who loot the country of its resources, while leaving the people in abject poverty.

Albert Quimpo further explains that the main problematic of the country's developmental bog lies primarily in the Philippines' weakness in its political development. This is because the prevalent political system in the country is patrimonial. That is, the "Philippine state is itself patrimonial, specifically a patrimonial oligarchic state. It is a weak state preyed upon by a powerful oligarch that has an economic base largely independent of the state but depends upon access to the state machinery as the major means to accumulate wealth."<sup>6</sup> The Oligarchs, in order to remain in power, took advantage of the immature and hastened proliferation of provincial and local electoral offices during the American reformulation of Philippine politics, thus paved the way for, what Quimpo referred as, "palm days" of Philippine political dynasties.<sup>7</sup> The rise of political dynasties and monopolistic agents in Philippine politics have entrenched power predators and warlords in most local districts in the country, they are those who utilized political violence and intimidations in order to remain in power. Hutchcroft stresses that there was "nothing inevitable about this economic elite being transformed into powerful political-economic elite; rather, this change came about through the very deliberate creation of new political institutions by the American colonial leadership."<sup>8</sup> Such political institutions willfully allowed for the marrying of the past colonial structure of domination, discussed in the introduction of this paper, with the semi-feudal institutions introduced by the Americans to manipulate the people to believe on their propaganda of democratization.

John Sidel in furthering the claims of Hutchcroft, contrasted the kind of semi-feudalistic system that was introduced by the Americans in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to that of the Spanish *principalia*. He asserted that while the Spanish colonial regime delegated persons -caciques- to rule certain municipalities under the close supervision of a Spanish priest in the locality; the

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<sup>6</sup> Gilbert Quimpo, Oligarchic Patrimonial, Bossism, Electoral Clientelism, and Contested Democracy in the Philippines, Comparative Politics, Vol.37, no.2 (January, 2005), 231.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Hutchcroft and Joel Rocamora, Strong Demands and Weak Institution, 263.



Americans in marrying and extending the 'primitive accumulation' "expanded the structure of private control over the local coercive and extractive agencies of the state upwards through the subordination of a national state apparatus to provincial and national level elected officials."<sup>9</sup> For Sidel the subordination of local coercive and extractive agencies to state apparatus combined with the primitive capital accumulation during the American colonial regime paved the way for the emergence and entrenchment of local elites and warlords in Philippine democratic system.<sup>10</sup> This is where he departs from the common description of Philippine democratic institution as being a weak state preyed upon by oligarchs. He argues that it is rather precisely of its strong state constitution from the American colonial regime muddled with elitist and predatory ideologies that the country's democratic deficit is rooted upon.

The prevalent nature of Philippine democracy: patrimonial/elite democracy, Bossism, Oligarchic politics, Patron-client factional politics, necessarily paved the way for the proliferation of local bosses and political predators. Political dynasty is a necessary by product of the aforementioned nature of Philippine politics. Most of the country's political offices, from the local to national offices, are occupied by elite politicians coming from different factions of political clans. It is in fact the case that a certain municipality is ruled by one political family who subjugates the people by oppressive and subtle enforcement of policies that serve the purpose of securing for them their hold of power over such district. Mindanao is not immune from the presence of political power predators; majority of the archipelago's cities and municipalities are occupied by political families whose immediate members occupy municipal and local offices. These political clans amass huge amount of resources during their being in office. They loot their district of its resources to enrich themselves from the money they get from budget allocations coming from the national government, while leaving their people in absolute misery and poverty. It is a political phenomenon in the country that whenever a provincial community is under a political dynasty the community is poor, poverty for this matter is due to the absence of competitive and functioning political system. Political dynasties worsen poverty and the

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<sup>9</sup> John Sidel, Bossism and Democracy in the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia: Towards an Alternative Framework for the Study of Local Strongmen, [Article online], <https://www.uio.no/studies.emner/SV/ISS/SGO2400/h05>, Accessed on, February 5, 2019, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 4.



capability deficit of the people; likewise they slow the growth of the provincial per capita income with their extorting activities and corruptions. Moreover, with the country's weak competitive nature of politics and with its limited choices of persons running for public offices – mostly are elites – political dynasties' rule over the masses is immortalized. It is the case that a certain municipality is ruled by one political clan for decades without opposition but if ever one political clan loses in the election another rival power predator will replace and will continue the past oppression and injustices. These warlords remain in power because of their fraudulent electoral practices such as, vote buying coupled with violence and intimidation every election. They win local elections with the use of political harassments and killings; they bribe the electorates; they intimidate prospect political competitors by their private armies. Such is the case that in most of the provinces where political dynasts rule and are engage with active political disputes against another dynasty, election times are often identified with political harassments and violence.

Furthermore, the persistent existence of political dynasties and local warlords in Mindanao is one of the reasons why most of the people in the region are poor. Poverty is not a contingent phenomenon caused primarily by the socio-political atmosphere of the place; rather it is willed and designed by these political predators for power preservation. Poverty, in this regard, is a developmental deficit that is caused primarily by the proliferation of systemic deprivations designed by the ruling dynasty for power holding. This explains why most districts ran by political dynasties are often poor, especially in most rural areas. They allow the people surrounding them to remain poor and ignorant, for in the poverty of the people the entrenchment of these political families is secured. Political dynasty breeds poverty, for such systemic capability deficit is the best alternative for controlling the people and of maintaining political power. The poor are seen as expendables, mercilessly exploited and used until they are exhausted, while these predators live in extravagance and prosperity.

### **3. Ozamis City and the Rise of a Political Dynasty**

Among the many provinces and cities that are ruled by political elite families in Mindanao is Ozamis city. Historically Ozamis was not its original name; accordingly, it was named after a Subanen word *Kuyamis* which refers to a variety of coconut named after its original settlers who



were the Subanen people. Then it was later on changed into *Misamis* during the Spanish colonization period. Moreover, before the coming of the Spanish colonizers, the town was constantly ravaged by the “Marauding pirates” who caused the Subanen settlers to flee to the neighboring provinces of Misamis Occidental and Zamboanga Del Norte, there to create their own communities even up to the present. *Misamis* was not conquered by arm but by religion, shortly after the coming of Jesuit missionaries the place was made as the “principal anchorage in Mindanao by the Spanish conquistadors in 1757 with the building of the stone fort –*Cotta*-.”<sup>11</sup> Moreover, its foundation as a city was on July 16, 1948 roughly three years after the Second World War. And by virtue of the House Bill No. 1656, the name Misamis was changed into Ozamiz in honor of the late senator Jose Ozamiz. “Ozamiz has gone a long way from an Old Spanish settlement to its present enviable economic position in the region. It is now emerging as one of the fastest growing cities in Northwestern Mindanao.”<sup>12</sup>

Different from the usual bailiwicks that are ruled by oppressive warlords of elite and landed descendants; Ozamiz city’s ruling elite did not come from such background. Their rising into power was not due to their wealth and control over the local coercive and material resources, but rather from their popular root thanks to their patriarch who gave to them such political advantage. The Parojinogs’ eventual rise to power was linked to their patriarch’s sympathetic character towards the poor people of Ozamiz. Octavio “Ongkoy” Parojinog was imagined to be a kind-hearted man, whose sympathy is always towards helping the poor in “Lawis” thereby earning the name for himself the “Robin Hood of Lawis”.<sup>13</sup> He would give a portion of the money he gets from their illegal activities to the people; the locals verify this saying that Ongkoy would distribute his share to the poor people of Lawis. And whenever somebody from his neighborhood asked for help, he was always ready to give a hand. Such sympathetic character of the patriarch of the clan persisted even to the present day, it is true that when individuals ask for help (provided that such request will serve the interests of the family) the family, especially the late mayor Aldong Parojinog, is easy to approach and is always willing to help. The late Mayor

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<sup>11</sup> History of Ozamiz City, [article on line] <http://ozamizcity.com/CityProfile.htm>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Patrick Quintos, “Who are the Parojinogs of Ozamiz?”, [article online] <http://news.abs-cbn.com/focus/07/3017/who-are-the-parojinogs-of-ozamiz>, Accessed on April 7, 2019.





was conceived to be a good man, in his speech in Davao city, President Rodrigo Duterte admits that, being friends with him in politics, Aldong was a good man.<sup>14</sup> The late Mayor, Aldong, commands respect and approval from the people of Ozamiz because of his persistent resolution of cleaning the city from malefactors and petty drug peddlers. The late Mayor's all-out war against criminality and illegal drug trade in the city received positive reactions from the people and even from the church.<sup>15</sup> Aldong, the son of the founder of the Kuratong, was resolved to cleaning the city of illegal drug trade and crime that in an interview he empathically asserted that: "I am committed to even use the whip if necessary as proof of my determination to curb the city's rising criminality and illegal drug trade."<sup>16</sup> It is for this reason that the family's power-rule is paradoxical. They present themselves to be for the poor people in the city, but at the same time they are looting and depriving these same people from the life that is proper for them. In fact, most of the employees in public offices who were active during their time, never received monetary incentives during special holidays like Christmas and the like; it was only after they were dethroned by Chief Espinido, that local public employees started to receive their due incentives. The family gained overwhelming support from their close constituents despite allegations of corruption and involvements to illegal drugs. In 2008, both Reynaldo and the then Vice Mayor Nova Princess Parojinog, his daughter, was accused of corruption because of the allegation that they gave the award for the renovation of the city's gymnasium to their own construction company. In February of 2016 both were arrested, though they were never convicted because the Sandiganbayan decided to dismiss the case in June 2017 due to the prosecution's failure to ground their claims against them.<sup>17</sup> But the biggest allegation was made by the President himself in August 2016, when in his speech he included three of the Parojinog family

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<sup>14</sup> Anonymous, "Duterte admits Parojinog's friendship, sack of crabs didn't save Ozamiz city Mayor from Bloody End," [article online] <http://politics.com.ph/duterte-admits-parojinog-s-friendship-sack-of-crabs-didn-t-save-ozamiz-city-mayor-from-bloody-end>, Accessed on April 5, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Jose Torres Jr. "The Making of a Mindanao Mafia", [article online] <http://josetorres.blogspot.com>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Katerina Francisco and Jodesz Gavilan, "From Kuratong Baleleng to elected gov't: The rise of the Parojinogs" [article online] <http://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/ig/177255-parojinog-family-history-kuratong-baleleng>, Accessed on April 5, 2019.



members, Reynaldo, Ricardo, and Nova Princess, in his list of 150 narco-politicians in the country.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, their fame and power started in 1986, when army Maj. Franco Calanog organized the *Kuratong Baleleng Group* which was at that time a counter-insurgency organization intended to battle against the growing threat from the communist guerillas in Misamis Occidental, Zamboanga del Norte and Zamboanga del Sur.<sup>19</sup> By the time the threats from the communist group deescalated in 1988, the *Kuratong Baleleng* were disassembled and were left to function on their own without military and government supervision. After the group's disorganization, Torres writes that: "Without military supervision, the group rapidly metamorphosed into an organized criminal syndicate. A lot of kidnapping, robberies, smuggling, murders, and extortion were attributed to the group."<sup>20</sup> What started as an anti-insurgency group intended to fight against the growing threat from the left, the Kuratong had metamorphosed into a criminal group and with the growing influence and notoriety of the gang, a Mindanao organized mafia was born. At the peak of the Kuratong's power reports claim that there were over 40, 000 active members scattered all over the country.<sup>21</sup> In a 1999 news interview Aldong was asked how many people of Ozamiz were members of the Kuratong gang, he categorically answered that almost everyone in the city are members.<sup>22</sup>

With the unprecedented success and power of the Kuratong "Ongkoy" allegedly engaged himself and the gang members to illegal activities; from bank robberies, extortions, kidnapping, smuggling, illegal gambling to illegal drug trades in the entire country. But what distinguishes the Parojinog patriarch from a typical bandit leader was his magnanimous character towards the poor people of "Lawis". It is said that the patriarch would distribute a portion of the money they get from their lootings to the people, thereby earning the name "Robin Hood". In 1990, Octavio met his tragic end when he was gunned down by two soldiers of the Philippine Constabulary while

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Jose Torres Jr. "The Making of a Mindanao Mafia", [article online] <http://josetorres.blogspot.com>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Nicali De Guzman, "Most Wanted: Kuratong Baleleng Gang," [article online]://www.esquiremag.ph/long-reads/features/kuratong-baleleng-parojinog-al729-20180918-lfrm, Accessed on April 3, 2019.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.



servicing an arrest warrant against him.<sup>23</sup> The incident led also to the death of the arresting officers after Renato took over the leadership of the gang and one by one killed the arresting officers.<sup>24</sup> The death of the patriarch of the Parojinog clan and the leader of the notorious Mindanao mafia had led to the splitting of the gang into three main groups. According to the National Bureau of Investigations, with their father dead, the gang splintered into three groups of Renato “Nato” and Reynaldo “Aldong”, the sons of Ongkoy, who operated in Mindanao, Cebu, Negros, and Metro Manila. The Carlito “Dodo Miklo” Calasan group, “Miklo” is the nephew of the late patriarch whose group operated in Iligan, General Santos City, Cebu City, and Metro Manila. The last group is that of the Ozamiz Boys group which consisted of the original members of the Kuratong who stayed in Ozamiz.<sup>25</sup> All these main groups, and their subgroups that emerged later as the group started to gain support from national politicians and powerful oligarchs of the country, proliferated criminal activities mentioned above. According to the Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (ISAFP) report the Kuratong Baleleng syndicate was behind “the P2 million robbery of Solid Bank in Tangub City in 1988, the P12 million Monte de Piedad armored van robbery on Roxas Blvd. in 1990, the P5 million heist at an RCBC bank in Pampanga, and the P12 million Traders Royal Bank robbery in Buendia in 1991.”<sup>26</sup>

The influence and the impression made by the late Octavio parojinog to the people of Ozamis was partly the reason why the late mayor Aldong Parojinog won the 2001 mayoral election by a landslide. The Kuratong Baleleng gained respect and trust from the residents of Lawis and from some people of Ozamis with their “charitable acts” of dividing the produce of their loot to the poor. This, the Parojinog used as their political machinery to completely place the entire city under their power over the past decades. In effect, the rise of the Parojinog clan to power was actualized by their immediate affiliation to the *Kuratong Baleleng* syndicate and their populist ideology of putting the people’s welfare at the core of their political projects. The use of political violence, intimidations and harassments is prevalent in Ozamis city every election

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<sup>23</sup> Katerina Francisco and Jodesz Gavilan, “From Kuratong Baleleng to elected gov’t: The rise of the Parojinogs” [article online].

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Nicai De Guzman, “Most Wanted: Kuratong Baleleng Gang,” [article online].

<sup>26</sup> Patrick Quintos, “Who are the Parojinogs of Ozamiz?”, [article online], <http://news.abs-cbn.com/focus/017/30/17/who-are-the-parojinogs-of-ozamiz>, Accessed on April 7, 2019.



period, so that nobody would dare go against them every election; they were able to preserve their power without contestations and they managed to put in office their own immediate relatives. Despite of the Parojinogs' latent inefficiency in running a democratic government and their political machinery's apparent notoriety they remained to be popular among the people and maintained their power-rule in Ozamis city for decades. For almost 20 years the family ruled the city almost without contestations. They ruled the place with their political machinery and they were able to cast a long shadow of control over the state's bureaucracy. They were the local power brokers who milked in the incoherent bureaucracy of the land and enriched themselves in the process. What transpired during their rule was a government marked by oppression and neglect of public welfare. Democracy during their time was a sheer abstraction characterized by systemic political and economic deprivation. Popular sovereignty was a sheer idea in the minds of those people who wanted to liberate themselves from the oppressive control of the ruling elite of the Ozamiz. The people wanted to liberate themselves from the control of the family due to their abject existence, while most of the family members are living a life of absolute lavishness and the prodigality. They amassed huge amount of wealth by plundering the city and the people of their resources and wealth. With the help of their most potent political machinery, the Kuratong Baleleng, "[the family and] the gang extort[s] money from most of the business establishments in the cities they control. Those who were not able to pay were punished by having their stores looted and burned."<sup>27</sup> Accordingly, in Ozamiz alone, majority of the business establishments (except those owned by the family and immediate relatives of the clan) are forced to give money to the gang; a reliable source disclosed that most of the large establishments are forced to pay two hundred to three hundred thousand pesos monthly, aside from those instances that a certain gang leader will asked from the owners additional pay for recreational purposes, like birthday celebrations, town fiestas, holidays and the like. Even the smallest business establishments and to the last street vendor, the group extorts money.

### **3.1. Political Bosses of Ozamiz City**

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<sup>27</sup> Nicali De Guzman, "Most Wanted: Kuratong Baleleng Gang," [article online].



During their rule, democracy in the place was an abstraction, an ideal that exists only in literatures and in the minds of the ruling elites who use it for their own benefit. Democracy posits no practical sense to everyone in the city, for while the ruling clan lived in absolute prosperity and pleasure, the poor remained miserable. The people were alienated from the state, for reasons that they were simply made to abide with the imposed bureaucracy designed by the family whose ultimate intention is for them to flourish and preserve their power in the city. The poor people of Ozamiz are reduced to sheer expendables used by the ruling power predators to secure their power-hold. Democracy was no longer intended to serve the people; it was made to serve the interest of one family whose intentions in running a democratic state is only to enrich themselves and to hold absolute control over the city, while leaving the people and the state in dire poverty and political decadence. They were the bosses of the land whom Sidel refers as the “local brokers who enjoy an enduring monopolistic position over coercive and economic resources within their respective bailiwicks.”<sup>28</sup> As mentioned above, the family was able to preserve power for decades because of their affiliation to the notorious *Kuratong Baleleng* syndicate and their popular propaganda of putting the people’s welfare in priority; so that the idea that they were loved by the people due to their supposed good charisma cannot explain their uncontested rule over the place and the fear they have made in the impression of the people of Ozamiz . Sidel asserts that such idea of people supporting warlords because of their presumed ethico-political charisma is utterly ridiculous; especially when we are confronted by boss violence.<sup>29</sup> It is enough to ask the people of Ozamiz how violent the ruling family is towards their perceived political enemy. For them, democracy is to serve only their interests so that anyone who tries to contest their legitimacy as the ruling elite will incur for herself the wrath of the family’s anger. It is for this reason that for the past decades no one would dare go against the family during elections. So that for roughly more than 20 years they hold power uninterruptedly.

Furthermore, their success in monopolizing power in Ozamis did not come from the lone support they get from the people, for as I argued such an idea is ridiculous; their success is

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<sup>28</sup> John Sidel, *Bossism and Democracy in the Philippines*, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Oona Thommes Paredes, *Capital, Coercion, and Crime: Bossism in the Philippines* by John T. Sidel, Stanford: Stanford University Press. East-West Center Series on Contemporary Issues in Asia and the Pacific, 1999, 137.



derivative from the support that they get from, what Sidel calls, “superordinate power brokers, whose backing has underpinned their emergence, entrenchment, and survival and whose hostility has spelled their downfall or death.”<sup>30</sup> This is materialized by the alleged link of the former President Joseph Estrada and senator Panfilo Lacson. Jose Torres Jr. in his article “The Making of a Mindanao Mafia” asserts, quoting a certain Danny Devnani, who during the senate hearing claimed that the former mayor of Ozamis was in frequent communication with the then President Joseph Estrada and Panfilo Lacson who was then National Police Chief and PAOCTF head,<sup>31</sup> for the political link and patronage of the then president Estrada to the Parojinog family. Accordingly, when Renato, the elder son of the Ongkoy, ran for a congressional position under the Laban ng Makabayang Masamang Pilipino (LAMP) in the 1998 national election he was convinced to run by Atong Ang who was Estrada’s close gambling friend.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, as the news of President Rodrigo Duterte identifying the family as narco-politicians surfaced; known personalities from the national government offices and high-ranking officials from the country’s law enforcement agencies were identified as protectors and as having immediate linkages to the family’s allegedly illegal trade. Most of their networks are woven through an entangled web of the country’s biggest drug lords. According to the Philippine National Police report, two of the Parojinog daughters were allegedly having affairs with the country’s biggest drug personalities. Maychell, the daughter of Renato, was married to Remy “Waway” Gumapac Jr, who was among Misamis Occidental’s biggest drug dealer and criminal personality. Reynaldo’s daughter Nova Princess, the former mayor of Ozamiz, was romantically involved with Herbert Colanggo, the country’s known drug personality who, even while in the penitentiary, continued to operate his drug operations outside.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> John Sidel, *Bossism and Democracy in the Philippines*, 5.

<sup>31</sup> Jose Torres Jr., *The Making of a Mindanao Mafia*, [Article Online] <http://josetorres.blogspot.com/2004/06/>, Accessed on February 5, 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Katerina Francisco and Jodesz Gavilan, “From Kuratong Baleleng to elected gov’t: The rise of the Parojinogs” [article online].

<sup>33</sup> Bea Cupin, “The Parojinog and the Tangled Webs they Wove,” [article online] <http://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/177255-the-parojinog-and-the-tangled-webs-they-wove>, Accessed on April 8, 2019.



It is of a general knowledge among the people of Ozamiz that the center of illegal trade (of illegal drugs and gambling) is in barangay Lawis. It is referred by the locals as “the cave”, rightly so, for upon arriving in the vicinity one is confronted by a typical community of illegal settlers whose housing states are very poor and the place is densely populated. And that in order for one to enter the place, one must pass through closely connected and aligned makeshift houses like walls of a cave. Illegal drug trade and illegal gambling are rampant in the vicinity to the extent that majority of the households are directly engaged in the aforementioned illegalities. Most of the houses cater drug trades and illegal gambling, “Karera” in the local dialect, in a small room situated inside the house where the transactions happen and where drug users consume their “shabu”. The place was so well known with drugs that as accorded by my source, “from morning to late night the place is filled with people coming from different places of the region.” The person further adds that, “Shabu was so rampant that even before you get to arrive at house of your frequent seller, you will be offered along the way, some from their small window like ventilation of their makeshift house.” The place is actually strategic for protecting the local’s illegal drug trades. Accordingly, everyone who are engaged in the illegal trades are obligated to give what the local calls “SOPs” of their proceeds to some of the family’s close constituents whom they refer as the dragons. Furthermore, robberies are so well structured and planned in the city, that if one is robbed in any specific place and time, one can ask for the object taken from the exact person by presenting herself in Lawis, (of course under the condition that you will pay for your robbed belongings). Stolen objects are bought back by the owners without any sort of legal intervention from the local police. Moreover, robberies are so well planned that each of the city’s strategic blocks are occupied by members of the gang whose main objective is only to rob the unexpected public of their things regardless of the time. Illegal activities flourish in the place being under the protection of the heads of the Kuratong Baleleng.

John Sidel’s description, of how some local warlords persist in power over their local district, fits precisely to that of the Parojinog’s dynasty. He explains that “many of the entrenched politicians and magnates in the country have derived their power and wealth not from private landownership but from state resources and commercial capital, and many of those entrenched politicians and landed elites who have accumulated large landholdings did so after -rather than



before-assuming elected office.”<sup>34</sup> Such is truly the case for the Parojinogs. As I have stated above, the Parojinogs did not start as a wealthy political clan of high stature in life; rather they were simply coming from an ordinary family of relatively meager stature being vigilantes in the beginning. Their rise to power was partly caused by their Father’s charismatic character towards the people of Lawis, and their affiliation to the notorious syndicate, the *Kuratong Baleleng*. With their political machinery and their use of political violence and intimidations, they were able to control the local government and manipulated the state’s bureaucracy to serve for their interests. Businesses are mandated to give their monthly “SOP’s” to the family’s close constituents for them to continue their business transactions in the city. Each establishment has their own lord to pay every month otherwise one’s business will be forced to close due to frequent harassment and looting accentuated by the members of the syndicate.

### **3.2. Radical Democracy and the Return of the Political:**

Joshua Cohen’s “Radical Democracy” argues for a positive outlook the specifications of radical principles may bring to the present discourse of democracy. Cohen explicates that discussions on radical democracy posit an ideological bearing to the contemporary debates on democracy. Its relevance rests in its critique to the conventional deliberative democratic schemes that – according to proponents of radical democracy – are insufficient to represent the people’s ideals of the best alternative life that each one has reason to value. Radical democracy is skeptical to the liberal’s project of consensual agreement and its tendency to reduce the pluralistic nature of the good life to an ideal general consensus thereby disregarding the relevance of ordinary citizens freely engaging in public reasoning and debates about social and political problems.<sup>35</sup> He further explicates that radical democracy is identified with the merging of two democratic principles of participation and deliberation. The former, on the one hand, posits the active participation of the people in public decision making. The citizens in this respect are given “greater direct roles in public choices or at least engage more deeply with substantive political issues and be assured that officials will be responsive to their concerns and judgments.”<sup>36</sup> The later, on the other hand,

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<sup>34</sup> John Sidel, *Bossism and Democracy in the Philippines*, 5.

<sup>35</sup> Joshua Cohen, *Radical Democracy*, [article online]

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*





posits that rather than concentrate on power and interests, democratic arrangements should be deliberative. That is a deliberative democracy “in which citizens address public problems by reasoning together about how best to solve them, in which no force is at work ... except that of the better arguments.”<sup>37</sup> The liberal insistence of an inclusive rational consensus is what makes deliberative democracy inefficient to answer the prevailing struggles presupposed in modern democracy. Such hope of an inclusive rational consensus rejects the prevalent existence of pluralism of values in the polity. It denies all forms of legitimate contestations, and hence, any legitimate assertions of one’s own project of the good life. What transpires instead is that with the presupposition of a sound rational judgment, given that the consensus is determined by rational representatives, what will be agreed upon will be the general will of everyone. And inasmuch as the principles of the good life is a product of rational individuals whose decisions reflect that of the general will, citizens for that matter are simply to abide and rationally obey. This is a problem, especially in most underdeveloped democracies in the world, because it prioritizes the majority’s goals over the minority’s projects; aside from the fact that it merely reduces the heterogeneous nature of moral valuing in the society to an abstract universality. What happens therefore is that most of the marginalized sector’s project of the good life is set aside in view of the supposed greater good the majority is proposing in the actual deliberative process. This explains why most of the indigenous people in the country are banished from their ancestral lands, and whose cry for justice and equality are silenced.

It is for this reason that Chantal Mouffe criticizes deliberative democracy’s main goal of “securing a strong link between democracy and liberalism,” while, “refuting all those critics who – from the right as well as from the left – have proclaimed the contradictory nature of liberal democracy.”<sup>38</sup> This is so because the liberals see popular contestations and antagonism as posing a threat to the values of liberal democracy. The main goal, therefore, of deliberative democracy is to limit if not eliminate all sorts of contestations, by reformulating the democratic principle of

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Chantal Mouffe, *Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism*, Reihe Politikwissenschaft Political Science Series, December 2000, 3.



popular sovereignty.<sup>39</sup> The reformulation has led to the demise of power in the public sphere while being replaced by an inclusive rational consensus between two pre-constituted identities. Mouffe sees this to be problematic, precisely because it fails to consider the social dimension of power; that power is vital for social relation. Moreover, the necessary constitution of power in the social sphere rests in the very nature of the polity; modern democratic societies are pluralistic in value. That is, modern political societies posit differences of rationalities relative to the socio-ethico principles embraced by many of its members. It is for this reason Mouffe asserts that power must not be seen as “external relation taking place between two pre-constituted identities, but rather as constituting the identities themselves.”<sup>40</sup> That is, since any social relation is a manifestation of hegemony – of power relation – democracy for this matter should not direct its goal to eliminating antagonism, but rather to see to it that such contestations are given due legitimacy. “Democracy requires, therefore, that the purely constructed nature of social relations finds its complement in the purely pragmatic grounds of the claims of power legitimacy.”<sup>41</sup> The legitimation of power in the public sphere entails that, democracy should not aim for a universal consensus among socially constructed identities, rather it should allow for the possibility of counter-hegemonic moves and contestations. That is, “agonistic democracy should provide the possibility of contestation between different and conflicting interpretations of the shared ethico-political principles.”<sup>42</sup> Agonistic democracy presupposes the idea of power legitimacy among socially and politically diversified identities. An antagonism that does not see the opposing party as an enemy to be destroyed and silenced, rather, it sees the other’s claim for development to be equally legitimate. Radical democracy insists on the idea of struggle that is imminent in liberal democratic institutions; a struggle from within liberal democracy that attempts to radically put into practice the liberal principles of equality and liberty.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.14.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Allen Dreyer Hanse; Andre Sonnichsen, *Radical Democracy, Agonism and the Limits of Pluralism: An Interview with Chantal Mouffe*, *Distinktion*, 4.



### 3.3. Agonistic Pluralism

Mouffe, in “The Return of the Political” argues that the main problematic of deliberative democracy rests in its reductionism of the nature of the political to sheer politics. Liberal democracy in its insistence of an inclusive rationality portrays a society that is empty of contestations and antagonism. The reductionism of the political to that of politics means that political antagonism is determined by norms and laws set by an inclusivist rational consensus in the public sphere. Legitimacy of protestations, in this regard, is limited to legislative regulations. Antagonism and contestations, for that matter, are seen to posit an immediate threat to liberal democratic institutions. So that the main goal of deliberative democracy is to limit, if not eliminate, all forms of contestations. The elimination of contestations is realized in the creation of the public sphere whereupon adequate procedures of deliberations, ruled by a rational consensus, take the place of legitimate power relation. Following Mouffe, such elimination of power in the political is itself the very limitation of liberal democracy; for it fails to give a substantive account of the pluralism of values prevalent in modern democratic societies. She asserts thus: “Radical democracy demands that we acknowledge differences – the particular, the multiple, the heterogenous – in effect, everything that has been included by the concept of man in the abstract. Universalism is not rejected but particularized; what is needed is a new kind of articulation between the universal and the particular.”<sup>43</sup> That radicalization of democracy is realized in the acknowledgement of differences in rationality and judgments among men whose nature of social relation is determined by hegemonic power relations. It is in the acknowledgement of the necessity of antagonism that democracy will flourish. She further writes that: “Pluralism lies at the very core of modern democracy; if we want a more democratic society, we need to increase that pluralism and make room for a multiplicity of democratically managed forms of associations and communities.”<sup>44</sup> Therefore democracy should abandon all hopes of a perfectly reconciled society under a universal and rational consensus. That is, democracy should not aim for a unified consensus; rather, it should create a space for conflictual consensus among diversified individuals to flourish. Agonistic pluralism, according to Mouffe, embraces the idea that antagonism is vital

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<sup>43</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, (London: Verso, 1993), 13.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.



for a truly democratic institution to flourish. So that “the aim of democratic politics is to construct the “them” in such a way that it is no longer perceived as an enemy to be destroyed, but an “adversary”, i.e., somebody whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question.”<sup>45</sup> The legitimacy of antagonism in agonistic democracy lies in the very idea that agonistic confrontations and contestations are the very foundations of a truly functioning democracy. “A well-functioning democracy”, Mouffe argues, “calls for a vibrant clash of democratic political positions.”<sup>46</sup> It is for this reason that agonistic democracy denies all possibilities of rational consensus to flourish, for such inclusive rationality rejects the legitimacy of antagonistic confrontations in the polity by eliminating all forms of political antagonism in the public sphere and replacing them with a general consensus. However, such elimination of power in the public sphere, realized by a rational consensus and the insistence of legitimacy that is utterly individualistic, for Mouffe, is an illusion that posits an essential danger to pluralistic democracy. “This is why”, she writes, “a project of radical and plural democracy recognizes the impossibility of the complete realization of democracy and the final achievement of the political community.”<sup>47</sup>

### **3.4. The Return of the Political in Ozamiz Politics**

For almost 20 years the Parojinog clan had thrived in Ozamiz city and was successful in establishing a political dynasty almost without contestations. They made themselves the local bosses who control all aspects of the city’s bureaucracy and economy; they loot the city of its political and economic resources for their own gains and satisfactions. Though it is undeniable that the family, especially the late mayor, had helped in establishing the city’s institutions and political structures as a democratic polity, it is likewise equally undeniable that they were the reasons why the city’s economy is bogged down and the people’s development is neglected. Furthermore, they succeeded in continuing their hold of power in the city not because they were loved by the people of Ozamiz – though it is true that some of the citizens, especially those who are close constituents of the family, loved them – rather because of their most effective political

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<sup>45</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *Deliberative Democracy of Agonistic Pluralism*, 15.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>47</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 72.



machinery characterized with violence and intimidation. Their affiliation with the *Kuratong Baleleng* group has secured for them a seemingly endless hold of power and control over the people of Ozamiz; to the extent that the locals call them the “Dragons” whose names are mentioned in whispers and fear. Despite the rampant irregularities and illegal activities (illegal drug trade in Lawis, illegal gambling, robberies, extortions and the like) that some of the family’s constituents are doing, the people choose to be silent over the aforementioned irregularities in the city, for they fear about what the dragons might do to them. More often than not, when I approached random people to talk about the topic of Ozamiz politics their common concerns are, “Will my name be mentioned in the paper?”, “I am afraid that their associates will know about me.”, “Are you going to record everything that I will say?”, “Is this only between the two of us?”, while some tend simply to be indifferent and remain silent.

For many years the family held in hostage the city and the people of Ozamiz. They were enjoying a totally monopolistic rule over the city’s political and economic resources, while most of the people remained poor and ignorant. Mendoza, Hutchcroft, Sidel and Quimpo were right in their contention that where a political power predator flourishes, there exists extreme capability deficit. Poverty and political dynasty, especially in rural areas, are necessarily inter-correlated. Poverty, in this regard, is not a contingent phenomenon caused by environmental and social principles; rather poverty is intended, designed by the ruling elites to keep the people in constant need for their patronage help in the process of rent-seeking activities. Ignorance and poverty are the two main tools of subjugation. The more the people remain poor and miserably in need, the easier to control and manipulate them. Such is the case of the people in Ozamiz city, they were not just controlled by the manipulative schemes of the ruling family but most especially by the fear they instill in the people with their immediate linkage to the infamous gang of the place.

But their seemingly absolute hold of power in Ozamiz will soon come to its end; when a progressive leadership was introduced by the person of Police Chief Inspector Jovie Espindo and which totally changed the fate of the city. Reynaldo Parojinog’s hold to power suddenly stop in the dawn of July 30 2017, when he together with his brother Octavio Jr, his wife Susan, his sister Mona and 11 others were killed in an attempt of serving search warrants against the family. News



report say that in the act of serving the purpose of the police officers the Parojinog side fired against the officers leading to the policemen to fire back, killing them.<sup>48</sup> The incident has led also to the apprehension of his daughter Nova Princess who was then mayor of the Ozamiz and his son Reynaldo Jr. After the death of the Aldong and the following incarcerations and the disbandment of the Ozamiz group, the people are finally freed from the ruling family's control. For the first time, for almost two decades; the people of the Ozamiz have experience true bureaucracy. Though the system, designed by the ruling family, remained to be problematic, but from the ruins of the past dynasty the people of Ozamiz city started to build a new democracy. The radicalization of democracy in Ozamiz was necessitated, disruption was deemed essential in order to salvage the dying politics in the city. For years antagonism ceased to exist in the place; political protestations and contestations were long been immured in the tombs of monopolistic power-rule that the family built for decades. The political was denied of its being and was replaced with a self-serving rationality and universalism designed by the Parojinogs in order to proliferate in power. Moreover, what transpired in Ozamiz during the rule of the family is precisely the danger that Mouffe referred as inevitable when deliberative democracy is left on its own to insist for too much consensus. The main problematic of our country's liberal democracy is that it is predatory, power is centralized within elites and warlords who immure the land with violence and intimidation, and in the process loot the country of her resources and divide among themselves the spoils. They milk in the country's strong but predatory system of democracy; thereby enriching themselves from the often-incoherent bureaucracy of the land. The Parojinogs have understood this very well, to the extent that they have made a political dynasty fortified by systemic political deprivations and injustices. But in the advent of a progressive leadership, the radicalization of democracy of the city was realized. Strong policies were promulgated and implemented without discretion. The city begun to see the dawn of democracy from above, power was no longer centralized within the political clan and the people were slowly empowered.

However, the radicalization of the city's democracy was not without contestation from the ruling family that eventually led to the death of some of the family's constituents and close

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<sup>48</sup> Bea Cupin, "The Parojinogs and the Tangled Webs they Wove", [article online].



relatives. The return of the political in Ozamiz city was effected by a leader whose courage and faith in his God have brought about the downfall of a dynasty whose power control has been rooted for decades. For some, PCI Jovie Espinido is a hero, someone whose name will be part of the entire history of Ozamiz. His progressive leadership has freed the city from the clasp of the power predators who held hostage the people and whose incompetence in running a democratic state is exhibited in the dire lives the people of Ozamiz are living. Espinido revolutionized the state by enforcing policies with an iron hand. He knew that it is only through fire that the crooked ways the people were accustomed to doing and living in Ozamiz will be straightened. What Mouffe calls the “particularization” of the masses was reinstated; the public sphere was cleansed from the capricious and oppressive rationality imposed by the former ruling bosses. The return of the political in Ozamis city is slowly coming to its realization. Though right now one must not be complaisant for, as Mouffe says, democracy presupposes a paradox. She writes: “Central to this approach [radical/agonistic democracy] is the awareness that a pluralist democracy contains a paradox, since the very moment of its realization would see its disintegration. It should be conceived as a good that only exists as good so long as it cannot be reached. Such a democracy will therefore always be a democracy 'to come', as conflict and antagonism are at the same time its condition of possibility and the condition of impossibility of its full realization.”<sup>49</sup>

#### **4. Conclusion**

Ozamis city is one of the many bailiwicks in Mindanao that was under the rule of a political dynasty. Taking advantage of the predatory nature of Philippine state, the Parojinogs was able to establish a dynasty within the city. Though it is undeniable that the family somehow was responsible to the growth of the city but it cannot likewise be denied that during their reign of power corruption and other irregularities and social injustices were rampant. With their most effective political machinery, I argue above that, they were able to flourish without contestations as the bosses of land. All form of political contestations and antagonism were canceled out, if not silenced by the very political machinery they are using. They live in absolute prosperity and

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<sup>49</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, 8.



prodigality while most of the people are poor and in dire misery. The political, for decades was silenced, immured by the violent force the ruling family in the past has imposed. But in the advent of the progressive leadership of PCI Jovie Espinido, the political was radically reinstated. The prevailing force of the ruling family was demised to the minimal and was replaced by a sense of democracy from below. Democracy is no longer in service of the power predators, but was reinstated to the people of Ozamiz. The autonomization of the people is realized, the political is reborn; for the first time in the history of Ozamiz, a mass protestation was made in front of the Capitol ground, where the people finally raised their head and shouted for justice against their long standing oppressors. The radicalization of democracy in Ozamiz was effected not by a revolution that came from the outside, but rather from within. The democratization of Ozamiz democracy marked the return of the political in Ozamiz politics.

### **3.5. Conflict of Interest**

The research was done by the author without any external aid whatsoever; may it be monetary funding or co-authorship arrangement. The data gathered are taken with full consent from the people who consented to be asked about the matter that is being studied. Since there was nothing of any sort of writings about the state of politics here during the reign of the former ruling family that is the subject of the study, the researcher opted to interview people (local persons) who were willing to share their experiences in Ozamiz. And due to the controversiality of the topic, the researcher opted not to disclose their names and their exact statements. With that the author declares that there is no conflict of interest whatsoever in the making of the research.



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