

“People Power” in Philippine Presidential Rhetoric: (Re)Framing Democratic Participation in Post-authoritarian Regimes

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Introduction

Crucial to the development of democracy is the kind and level of civic engagement citizens perform in society (Diamond 2008, pp. 359-62; Dahl 2000, pp. 185-188). Needless to say, various societal contexts necessitate different forms and levels of citizen participation. In more mature democracies, citizen participation comes in the form of political debates and discussions that creatively draw upon various methods and technologies available in the 21st century (Dahl, p. 188; Diamond, pp. 361-62). For societies that have gone through years of authoritarianism and have, at some point in their history, chosen to reject autocratic leadership in favor of a democratic government, mass mobilizations and protests become the most manifest political expression. Such political expression was apparent in the democratization movements in Eastern Europe in the 1990s and in the Arab Spring at the turn of the second decade of the 21st century.

The Philippines, which transitioned from a long-standing dictatorial regime to democratization in the latter half of the 1980s, shares with other societies-in-democratic transition the penchant for mass mobilizations and protests in order to break free from the grip of dictatorship or quell autocratic tendencies. In fact, protests were waged even during the dictatorial regime of Ferdinand Marcos despite his leadership's notorious use of state terrorism. The protests culminated in what is now known as the “people power revolution” – a four-day mass protest of hundreds of thousands of Filipinos along a strip of highway called Epifanio delos Santos Avenue (EDSA). The peaceful convergence of Filipinos-in-protest overthrew Marcos from his 20-year rule and installed Corazon Aquino, wife of a slain opposition leader and the emergent leader of the anti-Marcos struggle, into power.

Corazon Aquino's assumption into the Philippine presidency somehow parallels the rise of the term "people power," an expression that, from then on, found its way into the political lexicon of the country. It may be argued that people power in the Philippines has served as a model for democratization movements in other parts of the world. More importantly, it has served as a resource for talking about and for performing democracy in the country. It may be worth asking then the question, how has people power been talked about and rhetorically constructed in the years following the fall of the Marcos dictatorship? People power is in itself a rhetorical phenomenon in that it requires the deployment of linguistic and semiotic resources in order to shape and create impact on politics and society; however, I wish to suggest that its definition and redefinition pose constraints to its realization in the Philippines' democratization project.

In this chapter, I examine how the notion of "people power" has been variably cast in the schemas of post-dictatorship Philippine presidencies. I specifically examine how the post-dictatorship presidencies – from Corazon Aquino to the incumbent president Benigno Aquino III – have conceptualized the notion of democracy in their presidential rhetoric. The State of the Nation Addresses (SONAs) delivered by these presidents are used as primary data for analysis.¹

In the succeeding sections, I discuss the analytical framework used to analyze the national speeches of five Philippine presidents including Corazon Aquino (1986-1992), Fidel Ramos (1992-1998), Joseph Estrada (1998-2001), Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (2001-2010), and Benigno Aquino III (2010 to the present). I then provide a brief account of the socio-political and historical milieu of the five presidencies to contextualize their public addresses. This is followed by sections containing analyses of presidential texts and discussion of insights generated from the analyses. In the discussion, I argue that conceptualizations of people power across the post-dictatorship presidencies are motivated by presidential character, agenda, and the unique socio-political situation presidents find themselves in. I conclude by proposing that as conceptualizations of the presidencies are motivated by a host of

¹ The SONAs are annual reports to the nation delivered by the Philippine presidents before members of the legislative chambers. Mandated by the constitution, the SONA is the most publicized speech of the president and arguably the most talked about before, during and after its presentation.

factors, the notion of people power necessarily becomes malleable and this is realized in presidential text and talk. This malleability reveals the potential of presidential rhetoric to define the limits and possibilities of rhetorical citizenship.

Analytical framework

In my analytical framework, I assume that mental models (van Dijk 1998) mediate our sense making processes. When we make sense of texts, mental representations enable us to establish a link between linguistic or semiotic expressions and their socio-political contexts. In this paper, I examine these mental models by using concepts from cognitive linguistics. For the purpose of analysis, I use the terms “conceptual frames,” “conceptualizations,” “conceptual metaphors,” and “metaphorizations” that have been largely informed by the works of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Lakoff (1992, 2008), and Charteris-Black (2004, 2005). I generate what I call the conceptual frames of democracy through an analysis of conceptual statements including conceptual metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1992, 2008; Charteris-Black 2005, 2007) that underlie metaphorical and lexico-grammatical expressions found in political texts and talk. Specifically, I focus on identifying, describing, and analyzing conceptualizations of Philippine democracy as realized in the presidential speeches and how they parallel or differ from each other. I suggest that the presidential conceptualizations of democracy reveal how the notion of people power is curiously rendered in the national leaders’ visions of the state of the nation.

In the following sub-sections, I briefly discuss how the theme of democracy becomes a salient theme in post-authoritarian presidential rhetoric and illustrate (see Figure 1) how the analysis is done using extracts from the speeches of the first post-dictatorship president, Corazon Aquino.

The theme of democracy

This paper is derived from a larger study that looks into configurations of the various conceptualizations of the state of the nation across 23 national addresses delivered by four presidencies.² It solely focuses on the conceptualizations

² Navera, Gene Segarra, “Metaphorizing the Philippine Presidency: Schemas of Presidential Leadership in the Post-Marcos State of the Nation Addresses (1987-2009)”, (PhD diss., National University of Singapore, 2012).

of democracy in the State of the Nation Address or SONA, a constitutionally mandated speech delivered by the Philippine president before the Congress every third Monday of July. The identification of democracy as a salient theme in the post-dictatorship presidential rhetoric is based on a careful examination of the 23 SONAs and published historical accounts and documents on the Marcos authoritarian regime (from 1972 to 1986) and the four post-Marcos presidencies to get a good grasp of the socio-political and historical milieu within which the public addresses were situated.³ Crucial to the identification of the theme were accounts of the socio-political situation in the Philippines during the final year of the Marcos presidency⁴ and the Aquino administration's assessment of its presidential term (see Abueva and Roman, 1993).

Based on my analysis of the primary texts and my critical appreciation of previous accounts of the major issues and concerns that confronted the four post-Marcos presidencies under question (Malaya and Malaya 2004, Cortes 1999, Martinez 1999), I identified democracy as an important theme in the post-authoritarian Philippine presidential rhetoric.⁵ The theme of democracy subsumes the notion of "people power," a political expression that found its way into the national imagination during the fall of the Marcos dictatorship and at the beginning of "re-democratization" in the Philippines. Understandably, "people power" figures prominently when the theme of democracy is discussed in Philippine political discourse.

Method of analysis

In analyzing the SONAs of each president, I focused on portions of the speeches that explicate or discuss the focal theme. From these extracts, I

³ The sources of these documents include the library and archival sections of the Philippine House of Representatives; the University of the Philippines Main Library's Filipiniana section; the library of the UP National College of Public Administration and Governance; the library of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ); and the library of IBON Foundation, an independent think tank that regularly publishes analyses on the socio-economic and political situation in the Philippines.

⁴ They are significant in that they highlight the issues and concerns that the post-Marcos presidential leadership was positioned to respond.

⁵ Other themes that surfaced in my analysis of the texts include national economy, peace and security, and the presidency. They are not covered in this paper, but are covered in the unpublished doctoral dissertation by the author.

identified the metaphorical expressions relevant to the said theme. Since metaphorical expressions having to do with the focal theme were varied (that is, various source domains were used to express a focal theme), several clusters of related metaphorical expressions were generated. From these clusters of metaphorical expressions, I derived the underlying conceptual metaphors, which are represented in the analysis as A is B (e.g., DEMOCRACY IS A CURE TO THE NATIONAL ILLS). To illustrate this point, I present the following extracts from the SONAs of Corazon C. Aquino:

(1) I believe that *nowhere could you find more effective cures for the ills of our country* – such as the habit of oppression, the inclination to corruption, the betrayal of public interest – *than in the blessings of democracy: freedom; rights; transparent dealings; and a government of the people by the people themselves.* (1988)

(2) The failed adventurism has underscored the fact that *our restored democracy has gone past its fledgling stage.* (1990)

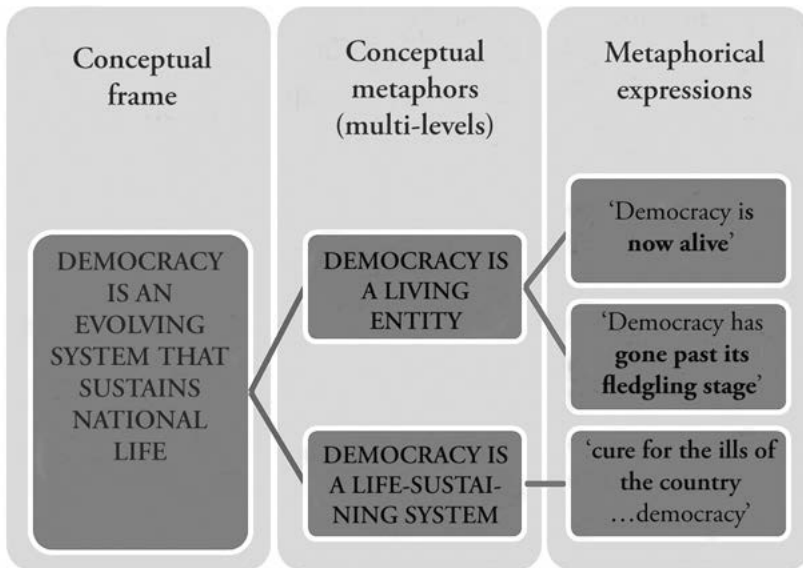
(3) Democracy, once a word, *is now alive:* this is our legacy. (1991)

The extracts above, taken from SONAs delivered in 1988, 1990 and 1991, all deal with the theme of democracy. Metaphorical expressions are indicated using italics. The first extract metaphorizes democracy as a “cure for the ills of the country” suggesting the conceptual metaphor DEMOCRACY IS A CURE TO THE NATIONAL ILLS; the last two express democracy as a living (“alive”) and evolving (“has gone past its fledgling state”) organism, thus, the conceptual metaphor DEMOCRACY IS A LIVING ENTITY. Further examination of the Aquino SONAs would show various metaphorical expressions that suggest other conceptual metaphors such as DEMOCRACY IS A BENEFAC- TOR OF THE PEOPLE, DEMOCRACY IS RESOURCE FOR PEOPLE POWER, and DEMOCRACY IS A FUNDAMENTAL REQUIREMENT TO A PEOPLE-POWERED ECONOMY. These conceptual metaphors relate to the conceptual metaphor DEMOCRACY IS A CURE TO THE NATIONAL ILLS suggested by extract 1. They are related in that the domains suggested by the terms ‘CURE TO THE NATIONAL ILLS’, ‘BENEFACITOR’, ‘RESOURCE FOR PEOPLE POWER’, ‘FUN- DAMENTAL REQUIREMENT TO A PEOPLE-POWERED ECONOMY’ yield the broader conceptual metaphor DEMOCRACY IS A LIFE-SUSTAINING SYSTEM. In addition to the conceptual metaphors DEMOCRACY IS A LIFE-SUSTAIN-

ING SYSTEM and DEMOCRACY IS A LIVING ENTITY cued by extracts 2 and 3, several other conceptualizations relevant to the theme of democracy have been generated in the analysis of the Aquino SONAs. These conceptual metaphors include DEMOCRACY IS A NATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT and DEMOCRACY IS PEOPLE-EMPOWERMENT.

Now, the conceptual metaphors generated from the various clusters of related metaphorical expressions on democracy are considered in the analysis as constitutive of a macro-conceptualization on democracy, which is referred to in this article as the conceptual frame. The conceptual frame is an overarching or general statement that shows the relationship of these various conceptual metaphors on a focal theme and is represented in the analysis in bold caps, that is, **A is B**. In my illustration, the two conceptual metaphors DEMOCRACY IS A LIVING ENTITY and DEMOCRACY IS A LIFE-SUSTAINING SYSTEM combined with other conceptual metaphors posited from other extracts on democracy (i.e., DEMOCRACY IS A NATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT, DEMOCRACY IS PEOPLE-EMPOWERMENT) would yield the following frame: **DEMOCRACY IS AN EVOLVING ENTITY THAT SUSTAINS NATIONAL LIFE**. Figure 1 below provides a visual representation of how the analysis works.

FIGURE 1 AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE LEVELS OF METAPHORICAL ANALYSIS



I now move on to a brief description of the socio-political historical milieu of the post-dictatorship presidencies to contextualize the analysis of the SONAs.

From mother to son: Presidencies after the dictatorship

When Corazon Aquino assumed the presidency after the people power revolution in 1986, she worked toward restoring democratic institutions and basic freedoms curtailed under the militaristic rule of Marcos. For instance, she issued presidential proclamations lifting the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus and granting amnesty to political prisoners. However, Aquino inherited from Marcos a fragmented Philippine society including a long-standing communist insurgency, a highly politicized military that challenged her government through several coup attempts, and a Moro rebellion fighting for an independent state in Southern Philippines. Notwithstanding these challenges, Aquino pursued economic reforms including economic liberalization and privatization of government-owned and -controlled corporations. Graft and corruption in the bureaucracy were addressed through the creation of the Office of Ombudsman to investigate complaints of illegal acts by government officials. In 1992, Aquino completed her term successfully with a peaceful transfer of power. She was succeeded by her defense minister Fidel V. Ramos, a cousin of the ousted dictator for whom he also served as the Chief of Staff of the Philippine Constabulary.

Considered an EDSA people power hero for breaking his allegiance to the Marcos regime on 22 February 1986, Ramos’ rallying principles in his 6-year term were “people empowerment” and “global competitiveness.” Ramos’ presidency sustained the economic liberalization pursued by Aquino and her team and pushed for the implementation of the structural adjustment plans prescribed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (IMF-WB) (Malaya and Malaya, 2004).

Economic growth and a relatively significant decline in poverty during the Ramos administration earned for the Philippines the label “emerging tiger” economy. His term is also noted for having signed peace agreements with military rebels and a major separatist Muslim group in Southern Philippines. Despite the modest economic gains and the historic peace accord with the two rebel groups, the Ramos presidency was marred by a number of challenges and controversies including the inconclusive peace talks with the communist movement and the 1997 Asian financial crisis (Malaya et al., p. 262).

Succeeding Ramos was his vice president Joseph Ejercito Estrada, who

was a former senator and highly popular Filipino actor. Estrada was known for his tough persona – a stance that was particularly evident when he dealt with the problem of persistent communist and Muslim insurgencies (see for instance, Ecumenical Movement for Justice and Peace 2006). Criticized by the mainstream Philippine media for his laidback management style, Estrada faced a debilitating political crisis due to allegations of corruption. Barely two years after his election as president, an erstwhile friend of Estrada's made an exposé on his involvement in an illegal numbers game that led to his impeachment trial before the Philippine Senate. The trial was eventually aborted, but it resulted in a popular mass demonstration similar to the "people power" in 1986. Estrada was ousted from power and was replaced by his vice president, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.

Arroyo's early months as president were hounded by questions on the legitimacy of her assumption to power. As there were still a considerable number of Estrada supporters, her successor presidency was confronted by a divided society. In her first SONA, she called for an end to political bickering and presented her agenda to win the war against poverty. She later established the link between her administration's war on poverty and the global war against terror by arguing that the commitment to the US-led war was necessary in building a "strong republic" (Navera 2011).

Arroyo ran for a full presidential term in 2004, won, but was later accused of rigging the elections. Public condemnation of her alleged involvement in electoral fraud resulted in congressional hearings, failed impeachment complaints, and mass protests to which the Arroyo government responded with a series of controversial executive orders and proclamations. These included, among others, an executive order that prohibited government officials under the executive branch attending congressional hearings unless permitted by the Office of the President, and the Calibrated Preemptive Response, which disallowed street protests without a permit.

In 2010, Arroyo was succeeded by Corazon Aquino's son Benigno Aquino III who vowed to make the corrupt during his predecessor's term accountable and who envisioned his presidency as a journey towards the straight and narrow path ("ang tuwid na daan").

"People power" in Philippine presidential talk

Table 1 below shows the conceptualizations of democracy that underlie the post-Marcos presidential rhetoric examined in this study.

TABLE I CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF DEMOCRACY⁶ IN THE SONAS FROM 1987 TO 2009

President	Conceptual frames
Aquino (1987-1991)	• DEMOCRACY IS AN EVOLVING SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT THAT SUSTAINS NATIONAL LIFE • DEMOCRACY IS AN EVOLVING SYSTEM THAT HAD BEEN RENDERED WEAK UNDER MARCOS DICTATORSHIP • THE RESTORATION OF DEMOCRACY IS A NATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT • DEMOCRACY IS PEOPLE-EMPOWERMENT • DEMOCRACY IS LIFE-SUSTAINING SYSTEM • DEMOCRACY IS A BENEFACTOR OF THE NATION • DEMOCRACY IS A NURTURER • DEMOCRACY IS A RESOURCE FOR PEOPLE POWER • DEMOCRACY IS A CURE TO THE NATIONAL ILLS • DEMOCRACY IS A KEY TO A PEOPLE-POWERED ECONOMY/CAPITALISM CONDUCTIVE TO GROWTH
Ramos (1992-1997)	• DEMOCRACY IS AN EVOLVING SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT THAT SUSTAINS NATIONAL LIFE • DEMOCRACY IS A SOURCE OF NATIONAL STRENGTH • DEMOCRACY IS A RESOURCE FOR DEVELOPMENT • DEMOCRACY IS A FOUNDATION FOR A GOOD SOCIETY • DEMOCRACY IS A FUNCTIONAL SYSTEM THAT IS CAPABLE OF INITIATING CHANGE • DEMOCRACY IS A PRECURSOR FOR COMPETITIVENESS • DEMOCRACY IS A COMPETITIVE EDGE • DEMOCRACY IS A COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE
Estrada (1998-2000)	• DEMOCRACY IS AN OBJECT OF DEFENSE AND PROTECTION • DEMOCRACY IS A PRIZED IDEAL • DEMOCRACY IS AN EVOLVING ENTITY • DEMOCRACY IS A STRUCTURE • DEMOCRACY IS AN ORGANIC ENTITY
Arroyo (2001-2004)	• DEMOCRACY IS A WEAPON • DEMOCRACY IS AN OBJECT OF THREAT • DEMOCRACY IS A NATIONAL FAITH THAT THE FILIPINOS HAVE FOUGHT FOR
Arroyo (2005-2009)	• DEMOCRACY IS A VALUE THAT FINDS EXPRESSION IN THE NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND PRACTICES • DEMOCRACY IS A PRECURSOR FOR FIRST WORLD STATUS • DEMOCRACY IS AN OBJECT OF THREAT

⁶ A detailed analysis of these conceptualizations can be found in the author’s doctoral research. Excluded in the said study is the incumbent presidency of Benigno Aquino III who is president from 2010 to 2016.

The data show a multilayered conceptualization of democracy especially apparent in the first Aquino presidency. Corazon Aquino, having been the first post-authoritarian president, necessarily set off the scope and boundaries of post-dictatorship Philippine democracy. Her multilayered conceptualization was bound to be adopted and re-contextualized by her successors.

A conceptualization that had been sustained in the post-Marcos presidencies is the conceptualization of democracy as an evolving entity (see sections on Aquino, Ramos, and Estrada in Table 1). This conceptualization had been substantiated through the use of metaphors that suggest democracy either as a structure that goes through alterations or as an organic entity. This takes into consideration that several factors influence the way democracy moves from one phase to another. The influence of these factors – people power being a prominent one – suggests the specific and unique process of democratization in the Philippines, an understanding of which may possibly lead to the articulation of the Philippines’ contribution to theorizations and practice of democracy at large.

Common to all of the four presidencies covered in this study is the framing of democracy as a national value. This is suggested in the following conceptualizations of democracy from each of the four presidents: RESTORATION OF DEMOCRACY IS A NATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT (Aquino); DEMOCRACY IS A FOUNDATION FOR A GOOD SOCIETY (Ramos); DEMOCRACY IS A PRIZED IDEAL (Estrada); and DEMOCRACY IS A VALUE THAT FINDS EXPRESSION IN NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND PRACTICES (Arroyo). The great importance given to democracy across the four presidencies suggests the presidents’ commitment to the national ideals embedded in the 1987 Constitution, a major achievement in the re-democratization process. It also implies that public addresses of national importance like the SONA serve as an opportunity for national leaders to engage in what Campbell and Jamieson (2008) call “a public meditation on values.”

In the latter presidencies – specifically those of Estrada and Arroyo – emphasis given to the conceptualization DEMOCRACY IS AN OBJECT OF THREAT is evident. Both presidencies had been criticized for being anti-democratic or harboring dictatorial tendencies and both responded by asserting that democracy was threatened under their watch. This common response channels that of Marcos. In his presidential statements, Marcos conceptualized democracy as an object of communist threat in order to justify his imposition of martial law (Marcos, 1971, 1972, 1977; Rebullida

2006). This rendering of democracy can be seen as a common feature of Philippine presidential rhetoric that had been fully utilized during the Marcos presidency and has been re-deployed even in post-dictatorship presidencies. That democracy is used to justify the use of state power to respond to the opposition and critical sectors of Philippine society makes democracy a problematic notion. It rekindles the discourse of constitutional authoritarianism that Marcos used to justify his imposition of martial law and consequently his abuse of presidential power.

While commonalities are evident among the conceptualizations across the four post-Marcos presidencies, the fluidity with which democracy had been conceptualized in the 23 SONAs cannot be denied. This fluidity may be explained by various factors. These include differences in key emphasis, shifts in domestic and global concerns, shifts or changes in presidential agenda, and the agency of the political actor. For instance, because Ramos emphasized the need to be "globally competitive" in order to attain the state of national industrialized country-hood (NIC-hood), there was a shift in the way he conceptualized democracy in his addresses. From rehearsing the conceptualizations rendered by his immediate predecessor, Ramos adopted and made more salient the conceptualizations of democracy as a "competitive edge" or a "unique comparative advantage." These conceptualizations were more attuned to his presidential agenda and the domestic and global concerns of his presidency that included the ratification of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade-World Trade Organization (GATT-WTO). The Philippine government's active involvement in the GATT-WTO marked the country's participation in the new global economic order primarily anchored on the discourse of neo-liberalization. In other words, each President conceptualized democracy in terms of how her/his administration could respond to existing domestic and global issues.

There also appears to be less articulation on democracy as a concept in the latter presidencies compared to those of Aquino and Ramos. If at all, the invocation of the democratic concept in the SONAs of Arroyo and Estrada was merely a reaffirmation of a national ideal – a "public meditation on values" as expressed earlier. This shows that other issues of national significance had through time taken the place of what was considered a primary concern in the early post-Marcos years. However, it takes a salient position in presidential discourse when a president is accused of resorting to authoritarian measures as in the case of Estrada in 1999 and Arroyo after the 2005 political

crisis. That democracy is reaffirmed in the SONAs or any important presidential speech to dispel public perception of a return to martial law indicates the Filipino people's tendency to be skeptical towards a strong state and its propensity for abuse (see Abinales and Amoroso 2005, p. 242).

Evident in the rhetoric of the post-Marcos presidencies was a need to re-conceptualize people power to harness its potentials for the new order – the post-Marcos, post-authoritarian, and purportedly a re-democratized Philippines. There appeared a gradual shift from *people power as a form of resistance* to *people power as an essential element of nation building*. This is particularly evident in the presidencies of Aquino and Ramos. People power as protest remained visible during the first two post-Marcos presidencies. The new conceptualizations of people power as organized participation and as capital would have probably taken root in the succeeding presidencies, but there was a resurgence of massive street protests during the presidency of Estrada. He was accused of corruption and culpable violation of the constitution, which eventually led to his impeachment trial that culminated in his ouster from power two and a half years after he was elected to the highest office. Estrada, during his short-lived presidency would emphatically speak of democracy as a national value that his leadership reaffirmed. In his 1999 SONA, during which protests against his move to change the charter were rife, Estrada would assure his audience that people power was alive. He affirmed that it was a guarantee of the protection of freedom, but would make curious qualifications on the exercise of freedom: “[L]iberty without responsibility is license...freedom without responsibility is the formula for chaos, anarchy, and lawlessness.”

Arroyo, who replaced Estrada, completed her successor term, and took on a full presidential term, downplayed the significance of people power as a symbol of protest (cf. Gonzaga 2011, p. 26). Arroyo's presidency – including both successor and full terms – was marred by questions of legitimacy. Throughout her presidency, she had to constantly reaffirm her position as “a constitutional successor” to the ousted president and as “a duly elected president” during her full term. After having faced a series of attempts to impeach her, Arroyo could no longer contain her disdain for people power as a form of resistance or protest. This is evident in the following passage from her speech delivered during a peace rally in commemoration of the people power uprising in 1986.

‘Yung mundo pinagdiriwang ang EDSA 1⁷. Yung mundo pinayagan ang EDSA 2.⁸ Yung mundo hindi patatawarin ang EDSA 3. Sasabihin ng mundo, ano ba yang Pilipinas? Pinakamagaling na manggagawa sa buong mundo kaya hinahanap sa buong mundo tapos parating binabaril ang sarili at hindi matatag? Kung ganon, sino ang darating na investor dito? [The world celebrated EDSA 1. The world tolerated EDSA 2. The world will not forgive us for EDSA 3. The world will say, what’s wrong with the Philippines? Because its workers are the best in the world, they are sought after by the entire world. But then it always shoots itself and does not stand firm. If that’s the case, which investor would want to come here?] (PGMA’s Speech during the Peace Rally at the Capitol grounds”, 25 February 2008 in Gonzaga 2011, p. 26)

Though not explicitly expressed in Arroyo’s SONAs, such sentiment appears to be salient in Philippine presidential discourse – Marcos or post-Marcos. When an economic environment conducive to business and foreign investment is emphasized in important political speeches, the call to reduce, if not dismiss, mass mobilizations almost always becomes imperative.

The incumbent president, Benigno Aquino III, son of Corazon Aquino, succeeded Arroyo in an election that other pundits would consider a form of people power – a repudiation of a reviled Philippine presidency. More than two years into his presidency as of this writing, he has also displayed disdain towards protest and mass mobilizations. In fact, he would make qualifications on the kind of citizenship that he considers beneficial to the nation – one that is “nakikilahok” (participative) not one that is “nakiki-alam” (meddlesome) (SONA 2011). He also indicts what he calls the “industry of criticism” especially instigated by the vibrant Philippine press.

The analysis reveals that over the last 25 years Philippine presidential rhetoric has worked in ways that constrain public participation. The gradual shift from people power as a form of resistance to people power as an element of nation building, which I mentioned earlier, reveals a drift from a radical notion of participation that propels change to one that is instrumentalized to serve the agenda of those in power.

I suggest that the shift is motivated by a host of factors: presidential

⁷ EDSA 1 is considered another expression for People Power 1.

⁸ EDSA 2 refers to People Power 2, the mass mobilization that ousted Joseph Estrada from the presidency.

personae, agenda, and the unique socio-political situation that presidents find themselves in. With these factors at play, the notion of people power has necessarily become malleable in so far as presidential rhetoric is concerned. The malleability makes it easy for the wielders of leadership to use the very notion of people power in order to affirm a privileged persona, assert legitimacy, justify political choices, constrain public participation, and even redefine socio-political reality. The table below (Table 2) summarizes the shifts in conceptualizations of people power across five presidencies vis-à-vis the presidents' varying personae, presidential agenda, and socio-political and historical milieu.

The shifts point to what Kock and Villadsen mention in the introduction to this book as the constructive potential of rhetoric. On the one hand, this potential, when tapped by powerful agents such as presidents, can encourage citizens to participate in platforms that are deemed appropriate and helpful to nation-building. On the other, it sets limits to what citizens can do; it constrains rhetorical citizenship. In such a scenario, the value of protest as a symbolic action is denied in order to privilege a less disruptive act but one that may be more in keeping with the interests of the state. This makes it imperative to examine presidential rhetoric not only for its potential "to induce deliberation" or to contribute to the "construction of an effective deliberative system", but also for its power to define rhetorical citizenship – how it limits and circumscribes possibilities for democratic participation in public policy formulation, in decision-making, and in charting the national course, at large.

Notwithstanding the influencing power of presidential talk, the Filipino people can reclaim and redefine people power in their favor. They can achieve this by being cognizant of how those in public office define "people power" and "democracy" and by taking possession of public platforms in order to assert their own definitions or counter-definitions of what it takes to participate in a democracy. For instance, a more active public involvement in memorializing and discussing the relevance of people power events that transpired in recent history would potentially provide a necessary counter-balance to how the current national leadership frames democratic participation. In this way, the malleability of democracy and people power works in favor of the general public and not just of those who hold power in public office. The Philippines is actually not bereft of examples of citizens and civil society groups who express and enact alternative visions and versions

of people power. A vibrant Philippine press and a social media environment that is conducive to generating public opinion have in fact served as venues for citizens to offer alternative frames of people power. It is through these platforms, for instance, that Filipino citizens have pushed for more transparency and accountability in governance both in the local and national levels. However, these examples have yet to be examined more systematically from a discourse analytical and rhetorical perspective. Needless to say, rhetorical citizenship thrives in a society where the concerns of the majority go beyond putting food on the table. In the Philippines, where major structural inequalities exist, it may take more than rhetoric to make rhetorical citizenship work. Enabling conditions that are socio-economic in character can facilitate symbolic actions and discursive practices that are participatory and less elite-driven.

Conclusion

This paper, which examines how democracy has been conceptualized in post-authoritarian presidential addresses, reveals that the notion of people power has become malleable and this has implications on the kind and level of democratic participation the government expects from its constituents. “People power” as a political expression has evolved in that it is no longer just associated with mass mobilization employed to reclaim democratic space or to challenge (the threat of) autocratic power. This is because various leaders who have assumed presidential power since the first post-dictatorship president end up putting their stamp on “people power” by reframing or recontextualizing the political expression in ways that are consistent with their personae, their agenda, and their appreciation of the socio-political and historical moments they need to deal with during their terms of office. These varied and changing conceptualizations of “people power” potentially reveal how citizen participation has been valued and constrained by presidential leadership in a period of democratization following the end of a long-standing dictatorship. A rhetorically cognizant citizenry enabled by a more egalitarian socio-economic structure would provide a necessary counterbalance to what the current post-dictatorship leadership offers.

TABLE 2 CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF PEOPLE POWER IN PHILIPPINE PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC

Presidency	Conceptualizations of people power (associated with terms as democracy and freedom)	The presidential persona	Presidential agenda	Some highlights of the socio-political and historical milieu
Aquino, Corazon	Democracy is people power (people power as source domain)	The anti-thesis of Marcos; heroine of democracy	Transition from dictatorship to democracy; de-Marcosification	Installed to power through people power revolution; credited for reestablishing democratic institutions during her term
Ramos, Fidel	People empowerment is an instrument toward global competitiveness	The president is a manager	Global competitiveness	Anointed by his predecessor; presidential term saw decent economic growth which earned the Philippines the label 'emerging tiger' economy; faced Asian financial crisis toward the end of his term
Estrada, Joseph	People power as a defender of freedom; qualification of freedom – "liberty without responsibility is license...freedom without responsibility is the formula for chaos, anarchy, and lawlessness"	The president as macho; extended his cinematic persona as a tough guy with the heart of gold	Poverty-alleviation; war on poverty	Won the election by a huge margin; accused of involvement in the siphoning of excise taxes and receiving bribe money from an illegal numbers game; impeached and was ousted from the presidency through people power
Arroyo, Gloria	People power is the heart of democracy; people power is a sustaining element of democracy; voting is people power ('let us address the highest exercise of democracy, voting!')	Anti-thesis of Joseph Estrada; positioned herself to allay fears that she would perpetuate herself in power	A strong republic; war on terror	Constitutional successor of Estrada; completed her successor term and later elected for a full term; accused of corruption in government and of rigging the 2004 presidential and 2007 national elections
Aquino, Benigno	People power is citizen participation (pakikilahok) and not meddling through giving harsh criticism (pakikialam)	The president as incorruptible and the anti-thesis of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo	The straight and narrow path	Ran for president after generating popular support following the death of his mother, Corazon Aquino; elected in 2010 to replace Arroyo; enjoys huge political capital from high public satisfaction ratings

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