

Ambivalences in Cohesion and Dissociation Framing of Labor Migration in Philippine Presidents' Labor Day Speeches (1974 to 2016)

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ABSTRACT

How do Philippine presidents frame their Labor Day speeches? What strategies do they employ to address the concerns of labor migrants? This paper answers these questions by applying textual analysis to 26 recorded and transcribed speeches covering the period of 1974 to 2016. Through framing analysis, which finds binding threads of tactics that enabled these national leaders to shape their stance about labor migration issues in the country, this paper argues that political leaders select and sustain common yet ambivalent and nuanced forms of cohesion and dissociation frames to appeal to their audiences. Philippine presidents position themselves strategically through the discursive use of cohesion frames by emphasizing the role of unity-through-sacrifices that the government has taken in order to protect the workers and by repeating unity-by-surrender to remind the workers that they have to give up their desires for additional worker benefits. Further, the presidents have used the discourse of dissociation to frame themselves as heroes who are able to solve the would-be issues of labor migrants and willing to fight along with the workers against common antagonists. In this research, seemingly innocent special occasion speeches like Labor Day speeches are seen as platforms not only to commemorate the value of labor migrants but also to reassert the power of the state to proclaim itself as a protagonist in its own myth.

Keywords: framing, labor migration, Philippine president, political communication

Introduction

Presidential speeches are mainstays of politics. They are vital tools and instruments of modern governance (Eshbaugh-Soha, “Politics” 1) as they present opportunities for presidents to set agenda, signal policy preferences, and share messages of comfort and assurance in times of domestic and international strife or crisis (Erisen and Villalobos 469; Eshbaugh-Soha, “Politics” 1). In the Philippines, presidential speeches have even been used to assert their regimes (Navera, “Political” 275), create legitimacy (Serquina 224), and foment hatred towards other groups and institutions (Chua and Labiste 2). The enigmatic power of speeches, therefore, needs to be constantly scrutinized to reveal their deep and, sometimes, dark surprises.

As powerful sources of soundbites and significant information, presidential speeches can magnify or downplay the role of government in handling economic, social, and political issues in the country (Encinas-Franco, “Language” 98, 105). They can be used to alter or even create reality or to overcome the dominant discourses of their time (Kock and Villadsen 218; Navera, “Political” 5). In short, a president’s message, prepared or extemporaneous, is crafted to feature, frame, and focus on certain associations between the political actor’s intent and the expected actions from immediate and implied audiences.

It is through this process that presidents are able to structure the way we see the world without being consciously aware of it (Humphrey 1). This process, also known as framing, shapes reality (Tuchman in Chong and Druckman 106) by giving meaning to “an unfolding strip of events” (Gamson and Modiglian in Chong and Druckman 106). For presidents, framing provides an avenue for them to promote a certain interpretation of events over another (Humphrey 22-23).

One powerful type of presidential speech is the Labor Day speech. May 1 speeches are texts that provide opportunity for presidents to directly address the concerns and grievances of both domestic laborers and labor migrants. The speeches serve as spaces where the state “symbolically transforms migrant workers into various identities and subjectivities” (Serquina 210) as in the case when migrant workers were branded “bagong bayani or modern-day heroes” (Encinas-Franco, “OFW Heroes” 61). Owing to the importance of labor migration to national development, labor migrants are usually given particular attention during the presidents’ message. These have come in the form of articulations of government policies, appeals for support from laborers and labor migrants, boasts of achievements, announcements for new programs and projects, and even ceremonial signings of laws and proclamations that address the supposed needs of labor migrants (Encinas-Franco, “OFW Heroes”; Serquina).

The Power of Presidential Speeches. This study assumes that presidential speeches have inherent power because of the prestige of the position of the speaker and the value that presidents ascribe to them (Hart 10). To an extent, presidents are able to shape the context in which the public sees certain events, issues, and proposals by defining the situation (Gronbeck, "Rhetorics Past"). This means that, as with most political rhetoric, presidential speeches can be used to alter or even create reality; and, in the same way, can be used to overcome the dominant discourses of its time (Navera, "People Power" 217-18).

Citizens listen to presidents to draw inspiration and to find answers during difficult times. As they tend to tune in to the speeches made by presidents to seek refuge in times of crisis (Correnti 5), they also look to the president to explain the crisis and restore stability (Fattah et al. 1). Presidents are in a great position to naturalize and promote certain interpretations of events through the words that they utter (Gronbeck, "Rhetorics Past"; Zarefsky). Thus, these studies suggest that presidential speeches have the potential to mobilize the public or retain the status quo.

As a form of political rhetoric, presidential speeches can fall under two types of speech purposes: the deliberative rhetoric, or a speech that advances a particular advocacy or call-to-action, and the epideictic rhetoric, or a speech that builds consensus and fosters unity (Charteris-Black in Navera, "Political" 2). However, the distinction between the two tends to blur. Speeches may be meant to urge policy-making while fostering unity at the same time (Navera, "Political").

In practice, presidential speeches are used to inform the public of the presidents' policy priorities, address domestic or international issues, or affect policy-making by getting the public's support and signaling to Congress the direction of the administration (Eshbaugh-Soha, "Politics" 8; Eshbaugh-Soha, "Impact" 119; Friedman 3). Speeches also serve as an opportunity for presidents to bolster their public image by voicing support or dissent for issues that are of concern to the public (Druckman and Holmes 756).

Presidential speeches are products of their times. Filipino critical rhetorical scholar Gene Navera states that speeches reflect the societal elements of present day-issues, problems, and controversies ("Political" 7). He further argues that political speeches are also a continuation and a product of their past discourses of a socio-historical situation, and thus contain vestiges of previous utterances. Hence, utterances in political speeches should first be located in the dominant periodic historical context of their time (e.g., Martial Law, the COVID-19 pandemic). It must also be noted that speeches transmit ideas that are beholden to their historical context (Navera, "Rhetoric" 29).

It is clear that through their Labor Day speeches, presidents have the power to decide which labor issues to highlight and how these issues are defined and interpreted. As presidential speeches are a continuing production of historical utterances, to fully understand the framing of labor migration in Labor Day speeches, it is necessary to study these utterances under their appropriate context.

The Nature of Framed Messages. The power to frame and to make salient certain messages in speeches is a worthy subject of communication studies. Robert Entman, a pioneering scholar in media studies, defines framing as the process of selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making them appear more salient to promote “a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (52). The main thrust of framing theory lies in the assumption that any issue can be viewed from different perspectives allowing for multiple interpretations that can have varying effects on people’s actions, values, and considerations (Chong and Druckman 104).

Framing structures the way we see the world by leading us to notice or overlook certain details of messages (Humphrey 15). Framing emphasizes parts of texts by making these “more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences” (Entman 53). As the power of framing lies in its function to heighten the importance of certain aspects of reality (Kuypers et al. 2), often through repetition in mass media, the frame becomes mainstream or ‘common sense’ (Humphrey 15). Framed messages have the ability to affect the attitudes and behaviors of their audience (Chong and Druckman 109). Entman argues further that frames do the following: define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies (52).

While the process of studying frames varies broadly across literature (Abdullah; Hänggli), political science scholars Dennis Chong and James Druckman provide a general overview of how studies on framing usually proceeds. First, an issue or event to be used as the context of the framing is identified. Second, if the goal is to identify the effects of frames on public opinion, the study must focus on a specific attitude. Third, a coding scheme is created through an inductive identification of frames. Fourth, the researcher must find the text, begin coding, and commence analysis (Chong and Druckman 106-9).

Entman identifies two important elements of framing: selection and salience (52). These two work hand in hand in order to frame a certain issue. Frames exert their power by selectively presenting and omitting certain aspects of a particular issue (Edelman in Entman, 54). Depending on how they are presented, the characters, premise, causes, and consequences of an event transform immensely as changes are made as to what is prominently displayed, omitted, repressed, and classified in

the text. On the other hand, salience works by making certain parts of an issue more noticeable, memorable, or meaningful to the audience through its repeated use, mention, or reference, increasing the chances of the audience remembering them. Thus, the perception of reality by the audience can be shaped and manipulated.

Labor Migration Issues in the Philippines. The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines labor migration in the Philippines as a “national thrust for economic growth” (www.ilo.org, 2022). It is the act of seeking employment outside the home country as workers move to secure financial benefit both for their families and the state (Simon et al. Rutkowski). The Philippines remains heavily reliant on them for economic growth. Remittances account for 9.8% of the country’s total Gross Domestic Product (GDP), making the Philippines the third largest recipient of remittances in the world after China and India (Oh 202). Despite strong economic performance in recent years—slowed down only by natural disasters and a global pandemic in 2020 (World Bank 1)—the quality of jobs in the country has not improved, leading many in search of better wages and job opportunities (Simon et al.). Based on the most recent estimate of the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), 2.2 million Filipinos worked abroad as Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in 2019 (PSA, “Total OFWs”). The number of migrant workers continues to increase, as the unstable labor market entices many to look for work abroad (Sicat; Battistella and Asis; Wozniak).

The continuing exodus of laborers has long been supported by the country’s labor export policy (Francisco 126). Faced with a record high unemployment rate (Wozniak 113) in 1974, Marcos created the first of many government agencies tasked with supporting labor migration, namely the Overseas Development Board (OEDB) and the National Seamen’s Board (NSB) that led to the birth of the current OFW phenomenon (Encinas-Franco, “Language”; Encinas-Franco, “OFW Heroes”). Subsequent administrations would continue and even expand upon this policy. Accounting for a mere 0.14% of the GDP in 1970, cash remittances continued to grow, accounting for an average of 9% of the GDP from 2005 to 2015 (Daway-Ducanes and Ducanes 95).

Although labor migration proved to be important to the country economically (Daway-Ducanes and Ducanes), it came at a great social cost not just to the migrants themselves (Wozniak), but also to their immediate families which had to contend with the long absence of a parent or a child (Zosa and Orbeta Jr.; Bryant). Further, with the feminization of the foreign labor force during the ’80s and ’90s (Orbeta Jr. and Abrigo 7), the majority of migrant workers worked as domestic workers or entertainers. Women in these jobs are more prone to abuse compared to those in construction work or other professional jobs as they face double discrimination as both migrant workers and women (Sayres 24). Stories of abuse, such as those of Flor Contemplacion and Sarah Balabagan, have captured the public’s imagination

(Rodriguez 341-42; Brillo 9), causing massive public outrage and prompting widespread clamor for reforms in the national labor export policy (Brillo 9).

As presidents continue to support labor migration, it is necessary to look at how they frame their speeches on the phenomenon. With power and influence inherent in the speeches, they can be vulnerable to manipulation and coercion by the rhetor (Krebs and Jackson 36; Gronbeck, "Rhetoric" 143). By studying speeches, we can gain a better understanding of how presidents have shaped our perception of labor migration and how they have used it to their advantage to gain support for programs and policies that extended what was supposed to be a temporary measure to address the economic crisis (Duaqui 85; Encinas-Franco, "OFW Heroes" 64).

Nature of the Study. To understand how presidents frame the discourse on labor migration in their Labor Day speeches, it is essential to look at presidential speeches as cohesive discursive forms of messages that signal framed messages across heads of states (Navera, "Political" 5). Looking at labor migration frames in the speeches of each president and figuring out the common discursive framing across presidents is necessary to add to the dearth of literature on political framing by presidents of the Philippines. The collection of Labor Day speeches from 1974 to 2016 provides us with a rich dataset on how our leaders positioned themselves, their administrations, and our country in issues related to labor migration. In this paper, we ask: how did the Philippine presidents from Ferdinand Marcos to Benigno Aquino III frame their Labor Day speeches?

Design, Method, and Object of Study

Textual analysis, a kind of communication research design, enables researchers to interrogate texts to describe and explain possible meanings of textual practices (Baldo-Cubelo 25). Philippine presidents' Labor Day Speeches from Marcos to Aquino III are artifacts that inform and enable discursive, social, and leadership practices of the country's highest officials. Textual analysis is appropriate for this study as it allows the researchers to decipher framed intents from the collection of Labor Day speeches.

Although originally held in the Philippines as a way to assert independence from American capitalism (Moya, "Labour Day 2021"), Labor Day in the country has since evolved into a celebration of the contributions of workers as a part of the International Labor Day celebrations every first of May. Eventually, the occasion became a platform for presidents to address the concerns and issues of workers. Literature shows that presidents tend to use speeches as platforms to develop public consciousness about some issues (Cohen 102), shape public perception (Navera, "Political" 15), and influence public perceptions about government actions (Navera "Rhetoric" 31, Serquina 210).

In this study, the researchers textually analyzed 26 speeches with the aim of surfacing discursive leadership frames related to labor migration. The said speeches, taken from online historical archives of the Philippine government’s Executive Branch (see the Philippines’ *Official Gazette* online), the Presidential Museum and Library, and the private offices of former presidents were read, transcribed, coded, and categorized to arrive at thematic frames. Since there is no comprehensive database of presidential speeches in the Philippines, we analyzed only what we found off- and online. And because the presidential speeches could be found in public domains, there was no need to inform the site’s administrators (Convery and Cox 51-52). The sampling technique employed, then, was based on availability and accessibility of the texts.

Actual statements from each president’s speech were used as the basis for the thematic analysis. After describing and coding individual speeches, the researchers proceeded to code common categories of frames to arrive at discourses that bind each president’s frame. Coding was data-driven, which means that the researchers agreed on the interpretation of the textual features of the texts and the nature and characteristics of the rhetorical and discourse frames. We translated the excerpts in Filipino to English and also reviewed and matched our interpretations with our framework. The following table contains the codes for the study:

Table 1. Coding Guide for the Study

Framing Constructs	Indicators of the Typologies in the Speeches
Cohesion (promotion of a sense of unity between the government and its stakeholders)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projecting labor migration as a patriotic Filipino act • Stating labor migration as an economic solution • Persuading labor migrant that the policies increase and expand skills set • Questioning labor migrants’ lack of support for government policies
Dissociation (projection of the government’s duty to implement labor migration programs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using proactive statements that project the government’s heroic position in creating labor migration programs • Blaming external factors (social unrest, socio-economic issues, political opponents) as causes of labor migrants’ problems

Results and Discussion

Speeches of Philippine presidents on labor migration are written to position the presidents as sources of cohesion between the state and its people, and as passive-aggressive enablers of calculated dissociation between the two social actors, too. In this study, we refer to these frames as cohesion and dissociation. On the one hand, cohesion frames promote a sense of unity between the government and its stakeholders by positioning labor migration as a patriotic Filipino practice or an economic solution. When Philippine presidents use this frame, they are doing so to convince migrants that their government policies are meant to increase and expand skills. On the other hand, the dissociation frame projects the government as the hero in the implementation of the labor migration program. This framing allows the president to use proactive statements about its role in labor migration and discursively blame external factors as sources of Filipino migrants' problems.

The use of cohesion and dissociation may be nuanced per president, but a closer analysis of the texts reveals coherence on the use and value of these framing techniques to protect the seat of the president. The results of the study show that each frame was utilized ambivalently yet conveniently by presidents of the Philippines for their own gains and purposes. On the one hand, the framing analysis revealed that Labor Day speeches from Marcos to Aquino III consistently contained portrayals of the government as solution-providers and proactive protectors of labor migrants. On the other hand, and perhaps in the same breath, Philippine presidents used both cohesive and dissociative frames to represent external factors such as their political enemies and the country's social circumstances as sources of issues. Our findings reveal a conscious choice by presidents in selecting frames and repeating the discursive effects of the framing strategies to foreground particular issues. Faced with issues on unemployment, low minimum wage, and poverty, the presidents utilized frames that enabled them to establish their administrations and to find fault in what they represented external factors such as their political enemies and the country's social circumstances as sources of issues. Oftentimes, these choices were informed by their historical context and reactions to events beyond the control of the administration, including economic downturns such as the 1997 Asian financial crisis, wars in the middle-east, or crimes committed by labor migrants. By including them in the analysis of the speeches, we are able to explain the choice of frames and discourses at certain periods of history and why some discourses continue to be used while others are replaced by newer discourses.

The Ambivalent Use of Cohesion Frames. The first technique, which the researchers labeled as the cohesion frame, is used by Philippine presidents to promote a sense of unity between the government and its stakeholders. In the labor migration

speeches from Marcos to Aquino III, there is a repetition of the technique, especially if the government wants to highlight the value of sacrifice in the Labor Day speech. On the one hand, this technique harps on the idea that the government sacrificed to attain solid national economic development. On the other hand, it uses the cohesive purpose of the concept of sacrifice to persuade political audiences that they have the moral and social obligation to surrender their individual wants and support the common good.

In this study, the cohesion framing is done by projecting labor migration as a patriotic act, stating the labor migration policy as an economic solution, persuading labor migrants that the policies increase and expand the Filipinos' skills set, and questioning labor migrants' lack of support for government policies.

1. *Projecting labor migration as a patriotic act.* Across presidential speeches, labor migration has always been framed as a patriotic act that helped address the country's economic woes and contributed to the Philippines' national development. Evident in the presidents' speeches are the economic benefits brought by labor migrants, not just to the country, but to their families as well. In Marcos's 1981 Labor Day Speech, for instance, there was consistent mention of the role that migrant workers played in enabling stable economic growth for the Philippines. In this speech, Marcos mentioned that without the \$1.3 billion foreign remittance from overseas construction contractors, the country would not be able to buy oil, which, in turn, fueled the nation. By this time, a second oil crisis triggered first by the Iranian Revolution in 1979 (Gross) and worsened by the Iran-Iraq War in 1980 (Zeidel) caused the deficit in the country's balance-of-payments to widen, necessitating the need for more remittances to fill the country's need for foreign currency to pay off its expanding debt (Dohner and Intal 563-64; Tigno, et al. 42).

There is a glaring tendency among presidents to introduce, support, and retell the significant impact of the practice of labor migration as a harnessed solution to support economic recovery and growth. Marcos's discourse of collaboration was echoed in succeeding Labor Day speeches of his successors, even during the administration of President Corazon Aquino, despite their political animosity. The latter would bank on this cohesive frame as a way to remind people of their role in rebuilding the economy. In her 1989 message, Aquino mentioned that a national livelihood program was necessary to help overseas workers reintegrate in the Philippine economy and strengthen opportunities for the workers' families such as agency-based economic opportunities and projects for those family members who are farmers, fishermen, and disabled persons in rural areas.

2. *Stating Labor Migration as an Economic Solution.* Other presidents utilized the cohesion framing technique when they proclaimed the role of overseas workers in sustaining the Philippine economy (Ramos, 1998), funding national interests (Macapagal-Arroyo, 2007), and contributing to the collective aim (Aquino III, 2014) of the nation state. Ramos praised the resilience of the Filipino exemplified “by our almost four million overseas Filipino workers” (1998). Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo saluted “our great Filipino worker for remitting more funds to our shores, for sustaining the hopes of our country and the dreams of their families” (2007). Aquino III, in 2014, even stated, “Ang pinakamahalagang yaman ng Pilipinas ay ang Pilipino” (“The most important treasure of the Philippines is the Filipino). Presidents would reinforce this frame by underscoring the country’s reliance on labor migrants. Corazon Aquino coined the term *bagong bayani* or modern-day hero to emphasize the worker’s role in national development (Encinas-Franco, “OFW Heroes” 63-64). Beyond that, she even issued an executive order that created the Presidential Awards for Filipino Individuals and Organizations Overseas to award distinguished labor migrants for their outstanding contribution to national development.

Even if labor migration is framed as an economic solution by the presidents, they point out that overseas work of Filipinos is not a state policy. In 1988, Aquino firmly reiterated that labor migration is a short-term necessity. In their speeches, the presidents maintained that their primary concern was not the exportation of labor, but the creation of advantageous labor conditions in the country so that Filipinos would not have to leave and find decent work abroad. In 1995, Ramos stated, “Today, our utmost desire is to keep more workers here at home—primarily because the jobs to fit their skills are already emerging.” In 2007, Macapagal-Arroyo reiterated this, saying, “At gaya nang sinabi ni Ginoong Tupaz nung binasa niya yung manifesto, inaasahan natin ang araw na meron ng sapat na magagandang trabaho na nilikha sa Pilipinas para yung mga masisipag na Pilipino ay hindi na kailangan mag-abroad para mag-trabaho” (“Just like what Mr. Tupaz has read in the manifesto, we expect that the day would come when enough jobs would be created in the Philippines so that our hardworking Filipinos would no longer need to go abroad to work”).

Historically, the change in tone from Marcos’ steadfast support for labor migration to his successor’s reluctance to overtly support the policy coincided with increased media reports of deaths, abuses, and exploitation of labor migrants around this time (Encinas-Franco, “OFW Heroes” 66). In fact, in 1988, Aquino was forced to issue a ban on the deployment of domestic workers abroad due to the increasing cases of abuse against them. This ban sparked complaints from labor migrants who argued that this only cut off their rights to government protection (Wozniak 106-7).

Cohesion is also shown when presidents state in the Labor Day speeches their support to systematize the overseas deployment of Filipino workers through the creation of government programs. In doing so, they are able to facilitate the movement of Filipino workers abroad, provide protection against illegal recruiters and create social services specifically tailored to their unique needs. Marcos would repeatedly use this frame. For instance:

[T]he Labor Code of the Philippines establishes an overseas Employment Development Board and a National Seamen Board which shall undertake the systematic employment of Filipinos overseas and optimize the national benefits therefrom in the form of dollar remittances and improved skills and technology for our people. At the same time, the establishment of the Overseas Employment Development Board and the National Seamen Board in the Department of Labor shall mean the liberation of Filipinos seeking work here and abroad from graft, abuse and exploitation (1974).

Fidel V. Ramos said, “[S]ocial protection must not be seen as extending only to local workers. It must include our overseas workers, who are in certain instances the most vulnerable” (1995).

Macapagal-Arroyo also used cohesion by initiating the National Provident Fund or SSS Flexifund for OFWs in “the form of a Social Security scheme that will encourage savings and investments as well as entitle them to benefits such as multi-purpose loans and insurance coverage” (2002). The same is true for Aquino III, who emphasized that those who lost work during the global economic crisis will be provided for using P1 billion funds allotted for them. As a result of this, he said in 2011, that they were able to put up a beauty salon in Payatas “sa pamamagitan ng ating Workers Enterprise at Expat Livelihood Support Fund” (“through the Workers Enterprise at Expat Livelihood Support Fund”).

3. Persuading labor migrants to increase and expand skill sets. Philippine presidents also used the cohesion frame to show support to the workers in terms of investment in skills training and education. Marcos explained that the country is sitting on a vast resource of untapped potential which can be its greatest advantage in the global marketplace, emphasizing the need for a “highly literate and high-quality Filipino labor force” (1974). Ramos seemingly used the same sense of cohesion in his 1995 speech when he said, “People alone constitute our competitive edge in the world today,” thus, the need to focus on “building a world-class workforce.”

Across administrations, presidents would promote government investment in skills training and education as a way to build positive relationships between the state

and its people. While different administrations employed different strategies to accomplish this, employability, both at home and abroad, remained the driving force behind the investment. This is seen in Marcos's 1974 speech when he debuted his programs on apprenticeship: the National Manpower and Youth Council as well as the Bureau of Apprenticeship.

Interestingly, subsequent administrations struck a similar tone to Marcos's grand vision in training Filipino workers. They continued to highlight the need for workers to be globally competitive in skills and training. Aquino said, "There is an urgent need to trim the irrelevance from our elementary and high school curricula and to put all the emphasis on the core subjects – literacy, math, and science – that have been responsible for the remarkable productivity and inventiveness of Japanese, Korean and Taiwanese labor" (1988).

With the increased visibility of abuses against Filipino labor migrants abroad, this frame would also take on a humanitarian dimension. From Ramos to Aquino III, presidents legitimized the continued investment in skills training according to global market demands as a way of improving the conditions of workers we send abroad. Ramos framed the need to improve the country's workforce as a way of elevating the conditions of labor migrants by placing them in better working conditions. He said, "That the Philippines retained the overall championship in the Second Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) skills competition—first held in Malaysia and then here in Manila—is proof of the competitive potential of our workforce" (1997). Similar sentiments would appear in Macapagal-Arroyo's speeches such as the statement that the Overseas Workers Welfare Organization allotted P50 million "para iangat yung skills, upgrading and bridging programs para yung ating mga seafarers ay pwedeng maging mga engineers and deck officers" ("to develop skills by upgrading and bridging programs for our seafarers so they could become engineers and deck officers"; 2007).

The samples above prove that Philippine presidents frame labor migration as a collaboration between the state and its people. By constructing the partnership as a cohesive relationship, labor migration becomes a synergistic enterprise between the state and the labor migrants. While the state crafts policies and programs to protect labor migrants, they, in turn, must do their part by helping reduce the country's unemployment numbers and prop up its foreign exchange reserves. What is alarming is that the presidents' discourses were not mere informative statements about labor migration. They were discourses meant to persuade the public on the benefits of labor migration despite its inherent risks and long-term effects on the personal lives of labor migrants.

Furthermore, the samples above also show how presidents begin institutionalization and normalization of international labor migration as a policy, despite the repeated denials of every administration that it is a state-sponsored strategy. Philippine presidents constantly repeated the role of deploying workers to international agencies as an integral part of national development. Presidents also pronounced the creation of the necessary institutions—from skills training to overseas deployment—to support its long-term goals to export migrant workers. These findings run parallel with the findings of Yellow belle d.M Duaqui and Jean Encinas-Franco, who both saw the tendency of Philippine presidents to emphasize the economic benefits of labor migration in their speeches.

4. *Questioning labor migrants' lack of support for government policies.* All presidents from 1974 to 2016 claimed that workers must be able to sacrifice their personal needs in order to attain the nation's goals. This frame has been used to subdue the cry of the workers to increase wages, end contractualization, and demand greater protection from the State. Evident in the speeches is the appeal of the presidents for labor migrants and their families to prioritize the concerns of the nation. Presidents framed the issues of their administrations as solvable only if citizens let go of their personal concerns. At times, the presidents' messages put the blame on the workers, framing them as selfish individuals. Marcos, for one, recommended that unions be sensitive to unemployment issues: "For so long as we have not overcome our chronic unemployment and underemployment, the presence of a large reserve of unskilled labor available at cheap prices will always act as a pressure to depress wages and working conditions, no matter how much protection the government may extend to workers by law, and no matter how militant the struggles of trade unions might be. For the price of labor is in the end subject to market determination, too – to what we call the law of supply and demand" (1974). Marcos would use the same framing across his Labor Day speeches. He reiterated that workers should be able to carry the weight of the country's problems if they genuinely want lasting economic stability considering "[i]to ang ating mabigat na pasanin, tayong lahat" ("this is our collective burden"; 1980).

By making workers privy to the success or failure of the nation, Marcos used the cohesion frame to push workers to sacrifice their own personal needs and wants for the greater good. He would continue to retell this message, this time with desperation, that workers need to rethink their clamor for wage increases as this has an implication on the welfare of the nation: "[K]ailangan natin ang masusi at maingat na pag-aaral ng ano mang patakarang may implikasyon sa kapakanan ng buong bansa" ("We need to study the matter as this has implications for the whole nation"; 1982).

The Marcos years were marked by high unemployment and underemployment rates in the country. Originally, the labor export program was designed as a measure to deal with unemployment as the local economy was unable to absorb thousands of new entrants to the workforce. The high unemployment and underemployment at this time led to an atmosphere of discontent and dissent, especially among the youth who were among the ones worst affected by the unemployment crisis (Maca 5). Attempting to avoid the unrest that characterized his second term, Marcos desperately tried, unsuccessfully, to prevent the country from heading towards an economic crisis in the waning years of his rule (Sicat, "Filipino Labor Migration").

Aquino, albeit in a more collaborative tone, utilized this cohesive frame when she delivered her first Labor Day Speech in 1986. Fresh from the people power revolution, she urged workers and labor union leaders to help her carry the weight of restoring the nation. She said, "[S]acrifices and burdens there will be, as I warned, but shared equitably by all for we shall be rebuilding from the ruins left by Marcos" (1986).

Aquino inherited an economy in decline, which meant she had to tackle many of the economic and political problems that besieged the country in the last years of Marcos's rule. This included overseeing the country's economic recovery after a long recession and renegotiating a massive external debt incurred during the previous administration (Dohner and Intal 563-64). The rhetoric of belt-tightening as a form of sacrifice was evident when she was called to increase workers' income and pressed to legislate a minimum wage in those years. For instance, she stated, "Legislating a minimum wage that will drive up prices beyond our control and reduce prospects for employment will deprive most workers of the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of growth and negate the gains we have so far achieved" (Aquino, 1989).

Ramos's Labor Day speeches contained the discourse of sacrifice that was introduced by his predecessors. Bent on encouraging every Filipino to support his "Philippines 2000" vision, Ramos evoked the workers' sense of empowerment as an important ingredient to develop a strong sense of shared accountability to the nation. In his 1993 speech, Ramos stated that the employees' demand for salary should be put in the sidelines. He wanted his listeners, particularly the workers and their unions, to fathom the importance of foregoing the call for salary increase and supporting the need for equal gains among employers, employees, and the State. He warned that, "[o]therwise, we shall end up still the Sick Man of Asia instead of the economic dragon that we aspire to be by the year 2000" (1993). Ramos continued to push for his agenda by reminding the labor unions to sit down with employers and the government in order to realize their contributions to his administration. Ramos's

reminder was sterner in framing sacrifice by insisting that workers be sacrificial lambs: "As we reap the benefits of liberalized trade, let me acknowledge the contribution of one group of workers who risk life and limb to ensure the smooth flow of trade in our port areas" (1997). Ramos's framing of the value and virtue of sacrifice became more pronounced as the Philippines fully invested in human resources as part of its liberal economic reforms. In his final Labor Day speech, Ramos announced that the sacrifices of the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) had been the country's biggest engine booster in attaining economic progress.

Macapagal-Arroyo seemingly agreed with Ramos when she utilized the latter's tone to celebrate the sacrifices of its domestic and overseas workforce. Although this discourse appears in the speeches of her predecessors, it is interesting to see how she modified it; rather than highlighting the trauma, abuse, and violence experienced by laborers abroad, she would focus on their stories of heroism, success, and prosperity instead (Serquina 217). In her 2003 Labor Day speech, Macapagal-Arroyo downplayed the ill-effects of the SARS pandemic and instead concentrated on the bravery of the OFW: "Sila ay mga bayaning hindi nagkukuwento ng kanilang pagka-bayani, pero mahal na mahal ng Singapore at Hong Kong ang ating mga health workers. Dapat mas ipagmalaki natin sila at dapat dito sa Pilipinas, mahal din natin sila" ("They were heroes who never told anyone of their heroism but our health workers were loved by Singapore and Hong Kong. We have to be proud of them even in the Philippines"). Much of her discourse in these speeches can be categorized under the banner of 'labor migrants as modern-day heroes'. Absent in this discourse is the fact that over 25,000 OFWs lost their jobs because host countries were in quarantine and still recovering from the impact of the epidemic (Jaymalin, "OFW Jobs Lost to SARS").

Macapagal-Arroyo's tone came as no surprise, considering that her term was heavily characterized by a more vigorous labor migration policy, aggressively recruiting laborers to be exported abroad (Duaqui 87) and even acknowledging the government's reliance on overseas workers' contributions to the economy (Wozniak 105). While the Ramos administration, and to some extent Aquino's administration, was able to successfully shift the discourse of labor migration from a government economic policy to a natural process, Macapagal-Arroyo modified this discourse to better fit her own aggressive stance on labor migration. Thus, instead of a natural process deriving from citizens' desires for economic betterment, her discourse on labor migration was that it was simply a policy that was actively supported, promoted, and controlled (Brillo 11).

Finally, Aquino III banked on the value of sacrifice in his first Labor Day Speech by urging workers to abandon the call for regularization. He suggested that

regularization would benefit only a few and may lead to massive job termination. In 2012, he insinuated that workers must surrender their support for regularization so that a majority of contractual employees may stay in their jobs: “May nagpaliwanag bang may mahigit 527,000 na Pilipino ang puwedeng mawalan ng trabaho sa taong ito at sa susunod na taon ‘pag ipinatupad ang ganitong klaseng mungkahi?” (“Did no one explain how 527,000 Filipino workers will lose their jobs next year if we implement this proposal?”).

Aquino III continued to persuade the labor sector to make the ultimate sacrifice in his other speeches, like in 2013, when he stated, “[H]abang may 1.8 milyong manggagawa ang makikinabang [sa Security of Tenure Bill], mayroon namang tinatayang sampung milyong Pilipino ang mawawalan ng trabaho” (“While we have 1.8 million workers who will benefit from this Security of Tenure Bill, there will be around 10 million Filipinos who would lose their jobs”).

The samples above indicate how Philippine presidents were able to frame the workers' fight for their rights detrimental to the plans of the government. By pointing out that the workers' personal and selfish concerns contradict the government's aim to protect the majority of its people, the presidents indicated that cohesion among labor groups and unions slows down the nation's progress. This draws on the Filipino values of shame or *hiya*, which Lasquety-Reyes describes as the “virtue of a person that controls individual wants for the welfare of the other person” (69). *Hiya*, if and when embedded in the speeches, may enable the audience to feel that they have the moral obligation to protect the interest of the nation by abiding with the government policies on labor migration. By positioning themselves as protecting the interest of the entire nation and not just of the workers, the presidents were able to vilify the collective desire of workers for better wages and security of tenure by arguing that this will make it even more difficult for businesses to expand operations and create more jobs for others. In a climate of high unemployment, hovering around the seven percent mark in 2012 and 2013 (PSA, 2012; PSA, 2013) those employed were treated as the fortunate ones who should have *hiya* to appreciate what they already have and give opportunity to those still unemployed. By fueling the guilt of laborers and unions through the constant call to abandon support for regularization in order to curb job termination, the presidents hoped that workers would agree with the government to delay salary increase, lessen the call for security of tenure, and strengthen the bilateral cooperation between countries to ensure the protection of Filipino workers.

The Ambivalent Use of Dissociation Frames. The second framing technique is dissociation. In this type of framing, the presidents use persuasive language that highlights the heroic role of the government in protecting labor migrants from

external enemies. From Marcos to Aquino III, dissociation has been used in four vacillating ways: as a proactive way of projecting the government as a hero, as a mechanism of safeguarding the labor migrants' rights, as a device in blaming external causes of the labor migrants' problems, and as a scheme of transferring the burden of guilt to the labor migrants. Dissociation framing is used to guard the labor migrants from possible work-related issues by highlighting the policy safety nets that are in place to protect the welfare of workers and, at times, to blame external factors such as social unrest, socio-economic issues, and political opponents and enemies as causes of the labor migrants' problems.

1. *Using proactive statements to project the government's heroic position.* Labor Day speeches by Philippine presidents highlighted the heroism of the leaders through the use of dissociation techniques that portrayed them as proactive experts who are able to foresee external threats to the success of labor migrants. In Marcos's Labor Day speeches, there is a constant focus on the dangers posed by illegal recruiters and how his government is able to stop this potential threat. In 1980, for instance, he signed Presidential Decree 200 amending Article 38 of the Labor Code, "making illegal recruitment a crime of economic sabotage" (1980).

When it comes to protecting labor migrants and reporting the policies in place, it is common for presidents to highlight the government's actions, and speak less of the people's plight. This is expected considering that Labor Day is also an occasion for the president to inform the public of the policies put in place to address labor grievances. However, the minimal mention of reasons behind the policies reduced the gravity of the plight of labor migrants since the president created the image of an administration that had already established policies addressing the issues.

Proactive heroism is enacted in various ways. Marcos utilized micro forms of heroic deeds by stating how his government identifies with the minutest of concerns of his people. In 1982, he declared: "Gayundin, itinatakda natin ang dagdag na funeral benefits para sa mga marinong Pilipino na manggagaling sa Welfare Fund for Seamen" ("Likewise, we have stated that additional funeral benefits would be given to Filipino marines. This will be taken from the Welfare Fund for Seamen").

Aquino would continue Marcos's form of dissociation by highlighting how she provides economic opportunities for labor migrants who have returned to the country and are having a hard time adjusting financially. She said of her national livelihood program, "these projects serve 162 groups and benefit 450,000 persons most of whom are farmers, fishermen, rebel returnees, out-of-school youth, disabled persons, displaced domestic and overseas workers and their families whose incomes fall below the poverty level" (1989).

Ramos chose to enact his positive dissociation in macro ways. He asserted that his government knew the external problems that overseas Filipinos were facing. He stated that his administration was ready for potential issues that his people may face: “For overseas workers, I direct the DOLE to speed up and expand the implementation of livelihood, credit and housing programs through the assistance of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration. I also direct the DOLE to set up industry boards for the protection of the rights of overseas entertainers” (1993).

Macapagal-Arroyo, banking on her much-publicized economic prowess, proclaimed that she had allotted enough funds to help workers and their families address unforeseen external issues such as lack of funds for education, medical, and counseling services. On various occasions, Macapagal-Arroyo framed herself as someone who knows the workers’ financial needs. In 2002, she declared, “At meron tayong P25M na ibibigay para dito para alagaan ang kapakanan ng ating mga OFW lalo na sa pagbigay ng medical and counseling services doon sa mga bansa kung saan sila nagtatrabaho” (“We are ready to give P25 million pesos so we could take care of the welfare of our OFW especially in terms of medical and counseling services in the countries that they are in”).

Additionally, presidents have also become more vocal about overseas Filipino workers’ issues in their Labor Day speeches whenever the plight of labor migrants causes public dissent. Being vocal about the issues allowed them to position themselves as the workers’ saviors in an effort to manage the reputation of their administrations. Marcos identified illegal recruiters as a “modern plague in our society” (1975). Aquino, Ramos, and Macapagal-Arroyo launched programs against illegal recruiters, too.

Ramos allotted a lengthy section in his speech about the hazardous working conditions of overseas workers and how his government ensures that partner countries follow their promises through bilateral agreements. Anxious not to commit the same disastrous errors of her predecessors, Macapagal-Arroyo, known for her political style of labeling (Serquina 215), positioned the overseas workers as essential to the Philippines’ quest for global economic recognition. Her Labor Day speeches packaged the migrant’s identity as global workers that should be a source of pride for the nation. Despite the continuous exodus of labor migrants during his term, Aquino III spent significant time discussing his rigorous repatriation program so as to counter the informal policy of the government to capitalize on the migrant workers’ exit from our country’s labor force.

2. *Blaming external forces as causes of labor migrants’ problems.* Philippine presidents have a habit of creating an external enemy to save their faces. Marcos, for one, had the audacity to use the dissociation frame by stating

in his speeches that the labor migration issues of the country are the fault of his enemies. Noticeable in his speeches is the act of washing his hands and blaming external forces as causes of instability and social unrest. He would also project his administration as a savior, an institution that knows how to find moral and practical solutions to various problems of the nation. In 1975, for instance, Marcos said, “Papatayin nating lahat ang mga kapatid [sa Timog], hindi maaring mangyari iyan. Kausapin natin. Ipakita ninyo na ang lakas ng ating mga Sandatahang Lakas ng Pilipinas ay may magagawang ibang paraan para masugpo ang gulo nang hindi dadanak ang dugo” (“We cannot kill our brothers and sisters in the South. We need to talk to them. We should be able to show that our Armed Forces of the Philippines has a different way of solving the problem so we do not see any bloodshed”). In 1982, he spoke against the “elements in the labor management who advocate the use of violence and defiance of law, who seek to turn collective bargaining into a bloody civil war, who utilize just grievances as a weapon to destroy the very fabric of law and society. To them we say: Hindi kami nasisindak sa inyo; hindi ninyo kayang linlangin ang mga manggagawa at ang pamahalaan. Pananagutin ko kayo sa inyong mga panlilinlang (“We are not afraid, you cannot deceive the workers and the government”).

Interestingly, Aquino used this frame-building technique against Marcos. She treated the Marcos administration as a regime that is external to the ideal democratic institution that she represents. In her first Labor Day Speech, she stated that the oppressiveness of Marcos and his administration is an external evil that is meant to be destroyed by righteousness. Aquino’s statements blatantly distanced her from the errors of the past administration. While doing so, she reminded labor groups to use other means of resolving disputes: “Finally, I appeal to you, in this period while the country is trying to recover from the tyranny and theft of the Marcos regime, to exercise restraint in exercising your right to strike. Use it as a last resort and only after exhausting all other means of resolving your disputes with management” (1986). Aquino used the dissociation frame cautiously as a way to convince her supporters and critics that she would not commit the errors of the Marcos regime. She was keener on using the discourse of rebuilding in her succeeding Labor Day speeches.

Ramos also utilized the technique sparingly as he was trying to assure the general public that he was in command. In his 1994 Labor Day speech, Ramos referred to the socio-economic issues of the union members as structural in nature but something that could still be remedied by collective partnerships. He said, “the union movement must share with its social partners the burden of retraining workers who may be displaced by structural reforms” (1994).

Aside from Marcos, Macapagal-Arroyo utilized this frame a lot. When she took over Estrada's presidency, she did not admit to the faults of the administration. She was, after all, a former cabinet member to Estrada. Instead, Macapagal-Arroyo portrayed her presidency as a solution to the problem of prices of basic commodities. In 2002, her Labor Day speech focused on packaging her economic stimulus plans such as the National Food Authority (NFA) rolling stores as an end-all-be-all for the masses. She pertained to her programs as one-stop shops that respond to the basic needs of Filipinos such as food and medicines. In 2006, she mentioned that a lot of workers are buried in GSIS and SSS loan penalties and debts so the government would forgive the collection of surcharges, without mentioning that it was the government that imposed the same penalties on its workers.

Baon sa utang ang maraming manggagawa, kaya – alam ko baon sa mga salary loans at housing loans ng GSIS at SSS, baon pa sa mga penalty and surcharge – kaya magpapatawad ang GSIS at SSS sa penalty ng salary at housing loan sa halagang halos 12 billion pesos.

(Our workers are deeply buried in debts. They have salary and housing loans in GSIS and SSS. They are buried in debts from the penalty and surcharge so I asked GSIS and SSS to forgive their penalties amounting to P12 billion.)

With regard to scams faced by online job seekers, Macapagal-Arroyo, in her 2007 speech, attempted to put the blame on an unspecified source that she fancily called the "internet".

Kanina sa manifesto na binasa ni Vladimir Tupaz, sabi niya may mga nilolokong manggagawa ng internet. Kunyari may jobs available, babayad kayo yun pala hindi pala available yung job. Kaya ang gagawin ng DOLE ay titignan itong internet na ito, eeksaminin kung totoo ba iyung mga trabahong yon para ma-expose yung mga nag-i-scam sa ating mga manggagawa.

(A while ago, Vladimir Tupaz read a manifesto about the fraud that one might get from the internet. There are frauds who post fake jobs, only to ask for payments without providing any work to Filipinos. I urge the DOLE to look at this matter in the internet, expose this scam.)

Aquino III used the same moral discourse that his mother Corazon utilized in 1986. His "Daang Matuwid" discourse both in campaign and in his governance targeted the past administration of Macapagal-Arroyo. In almost all the Labor Day speeches of Aquino III, references are made against Macapagal-Arroyo's corrupt administration.

He vowed to end the malpractices of the state and promised to bring the labor migrants to a straight path towards development.

In the analyzed samples, Labor Day speeches were no longer harmless messages but became part of the political rhetoric of the state, where presidential speeches were expected to build consensus and foster unity (Navera, "Political" 2), affect policy making by signaling to lawmakers the direction the President wants to go (Eshbaugh-Soha, "Impact" 118), and influence the public agenda (Cohen 88) by shaping and altering the public's perception of reality. They serve as spaces where the state "symbolically transforms migrant workers into various identities and subjectivities" (Serquina 4).

In using cohesion and dissociation frames, the presidents were able to strengthen their positions as change-makers and heroes worthy of the trust of labor migrants, labor unions and groups, and the larger Filipino society. They were not only framing labor migration as a solution but were also aggressively pushing for the institutionalization of labor migration (in the beginning) and the difficulty of letting it go (in the latter years). Given these standpoints, presidents pivot their rhetoric so that labor migration is appealing in response to external events and crises. For example, whereas Marcos framed the discourse of labor migration as an economic need, later administrations framed it as an act of heroism, labelling migrants as *modern-day heroes*—subtly naturalizing the abuses experienced by many labor migrants, as the public becomes more aware of the perils of life abroad (Encinas-Franco, "OFW Heroes" 61). They emphasized policies that would enable labor migrants to maintain their ties to their motherland through absentee voting and dual citizenship while making the process of remittances as convenient as possible, to ensure that cash in-flow from labor migrants would continue. These changes in rhetoric also appear in the study of Duaqui where she argues that the discourse on labor migration underwent multiple shifts across the administrations of different presidents (85).

Conclusion

This study concludes that the Labor Day speeches of Philippine presidents from Marcos to Aquino III were ambivalently yet strategically framed to assert that the government has always been on top of the labor migration issues in the Philippines. The choice to put the presidents as lead political actors in their speeches has been a nod to the vital characteristic of framing (Entman 53). Two strategies were used by the presidents to reinforce this framing characteristic: the use of cohesion and dissociation frames. Cohesion framing was utilized by the presidents to highlight their contributions to labor workers and to labor migration policies by evoking the value of cohesion through joint sacrifice between the state and its people. The

strategy allowed the presidents to urge the public to join the state in supporting its plans and policies. Further, the cohesion frame was also used as a weapon to remind the workers not to prioritize their own interests but instead, listen to the state. Using cohesion, the presidents deployed guilt as a way to enforce cohesion between the state and its people. The speeches would proclaim that labor migrants must sacrifice their needs for higher pay, more services, and better laws because these benefit only a few Filipinos.

Dissociation framing would be used when the presidents needed to highlight their heroic role as political actors. Presidents would proactively claim that they are able to create safety nets in mitigating the labor migration issues of Filipino workers, or mention that they have created policies, saved money, and safeguarded workers from potential and on-going threats. There were also instances when the same frame would be used as a mechanism to build trust in the government and to gather dislike for an external enemy by creating antagonists out of their political enemies or other sources of political, social, and economic unrest.

In all, these presidential Labor Day speeches from 1974 to 2016 are important artifacts of political discourse that translated campaign promises into policies. These speeches, through framing, were weaponized as strategies to create heroes out of the leaders, and enemies out of their political opponents and other institutions. Thus, an analysis of these speeches should be constantly done to reveal any manipulation and remind leaders of their accountability as public servants.

When presidents utilize framing that accentuates their motives and achievements and when there is a conscious effort to select and promote their own slants and perspectives, citizens must be able to guard themselves against the alluring promises of these political actors.

Presidential lip service will always be strategic. Citizens must be taught how to recognize what our leaders espouse. We have to critique what our leaders sell to us as repetitions of these presidential frames lead to salience of their proclaimed truths, which, eventually, becomes acceptable mainstream stories and myths of heroism, cohesiveness, and sacrifice. Prominence in the use of the myths of heroism helped the presidents package themselves as “truth tellers” (Navera, “Political”; Entman). A politically informed and media-literate citizenry has always been necessary in the Philippines.

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