



From Execution to E-Mobilisation: Luneta Park as Dramaturgical Protest Space

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Over a period of two decades, the Philippines has experienced a political transformation that can be characterised, at best, as an attempt to continuously define and redefine the contours of a liberal democratic order with social movements and citizen participation as a core feature of social and political life. One feature has nevertheless endured: the Luneta Park. Set smack in the centre of old Manila, the park remains a public site and a potent political symbol. From the execution of Jose Rizal, the national hero and insurgent anti-colonialist of the late 1900s to the “million man march” in the summer of 2013 demanding the abolition of “pork barrel” in Congress, the Luneta Park constitutes the one urban space accessible to all Filipinos throughout history. This study establishes the linkage between a physical site of historical significance and cyber-activism, a curious melding of tradition and technology that results in “e-citizenship” — an emerging form of participation that utilises the internet to promote and deepen democratic governance while continuing to rely on urban space.

Keywords: cultural constructionism, dramaturgy, social drama, pork barrel, Philippines

In the twilight years of Spanish colonial occupation of the Philippines, a well-educated member of the *ilustrado* class named Jose Rizal would return from Europe in 1887 to found the reformist movement known as *La Liga Filipina*.ⁱ He was a fifth generation Chinese *mestizo*, was educated in Paris, Madrid and

Heidelberg where he pursued his studies in medicine and philosophy.

Considered as the “most brilliant nationalist intellectual” during the latter part of the colonial period, Rizal wrote the nationalist novel *Noli Me Tangere* (*The Social Cancer*) in which he made reference to the problems of Filipinos with the Spanish friars. The critical tone of the novel resonated throughout the colony and his name became widely known. A second novel, *El Filibusterismo* (*The Subversive*), was written when Rizal’s family was evicted from their Calamba estate by the Dominican friars. Within the reformist movement, Rizal became a *cause celebre* and his writings galvanised anti-colonial sentiment directed against the Spanish friars. He was banished to Dapitan in Mindanao on 7 July 1892 and then executed on 30 December 1896 at Luneta Park then known as Bagumbayan. Rizal’s death effectively ended the reformist phase of the nationalist movement. In its stead, a revolutionary program sought to achieve independence from Spain and an end to the colonial era. The Filipino historians Agoncillo and Guerrero (1977) would regard this as a crucial historical moment, one which redefined the character of the anti-colonial struggle in non-assimilationist, separatist terms.

It is over a hundred years since the execution of Jose Rizal. His novels have become compulsory reading in Philippine classrooms, and numerous films have sought to re-interpret his life. But the most iconic image of the national hero was his early

morning execution, which, a century later, lives in the imagination of most Filipinos. As the Spanish *guardia civil* raised their rifles and were given the order to shoot, Rizal turns in an attempt to face his executioners, not wanting to be shot in the back as a traitor. At the moment of his death, he is facing the morning sun — a singular final act of defiance against the Spanish colonialists.

Fast forward to the summer of 2013. Facebook is abuzz with digital activists enraged at the story of Janet Napoles Lim who would otherwise remain invisible and nondescript were it not for her daughter Jeanne who hosted a lavish party for her 23rd birthday in Los Angeles, and bathed herself in a tub of cash, then posted it on YouTube. The story went wild on social media. In no time, the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) dug deeper and discovered tax evasion. But as it turns out, this was just the tip of the iceberg. Her mother was purportedly the architect of a PHP 10 billion (approximately USD 225 million) scam that defrauded the government of taxpayers' money through an elaborate scheme of funnelling money to fake foundations and bogus non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that were directly linked to several Senators and Congressmen through allotments from their pork barrel fundsⁱⁱ. Janet's nephew who worked as her personal assistant-turned-whistleblower divulged all the details of the massive operation during a Senate investigative committee hearing. The public learned of the pork barrel scam as a mechanism to defraud taxpayers through ghost projects of legislators who pocketed the money and rewarded Janet Napoles Lim with a hefty percentage.

The unfolding of the pork barrel scam remobilised the activists, almost the same ones that came out in 1986 to bring down the curtain on the dictatorial regime of Ferdinand Marcos.ⁱⁱⁱ Twenty-seven years later, the activists converged on the Luneta Park, the same place where Jose Rizal was executed over one hundred years ago. Dubbed the *Million People March*, the activists sought to demonstrate through numbers their continuing participation in Philippine political life, this time not to change regimes and political leaders, but to change policies and practices that restore faith in the political system, deepen citizen participa-

tion and uphold standards of good governance. The event was also the first social media-led protest in the Philippines.

In looking at protest in the Philippines, I utilise Erving Goffman's dramaturgical framework that emanates from a *culturalist* view of collective action, particularly a view which takes on what sociologists calls "cultural constructionism" — a theoretical presupposition premised on the idea that humans are "symbolic making creatures, who spin webs of meaning around ourselves . . . that we humans together create everything that we know and experience, or at least the interpretive frameworks through which we filter all our experience" (Jasper, 1997, p. 10). I argue that protests are "dramaturgical productions" whether these be conducted in cyber or in geographical territory. As social dramas, uprisings reflect the expressivism of social life — a central tenet in the dramaturgical perspective that asserts the primacy of human interaction in the endeavour to make meaning out of social and political life.

I also discuss the *scripting* and *staging* processes as part of a repertoire of dramatic techniques available to movement activists (Benford & Hunt, 1992).^{iv} These processes involve, among others, the mobilisation of symbols and images as part of the struggle to gain the dramaturgical upper hand in protest events. Scripting also includes enrolment of *dramatis personae* — the protagonists, the antagonists, and the audience including the media. Staging involves the identification of a literal centre stage, a venue on which the protest is made visible to the wider public. The choice of a centre stage embodies Sewell's (2001.) "strategic valence of space". Luneta Park is an obvious choice for historical reasons, but additionally, for its symbolic value, as well as the geographical layout of the park whose built environment can accommodate massive amounts of participants, turning it into a "matrix of power" (p. 58) and able to achieve a Durkheimian sense of "collective efflorescence."

I further argue that alongside these dramatic techniques is the formation of a protest "script" itself. As dramaturgical events, protests are not happenstance events, rather they embody "actable ideas" (Mead, 1934) which are fashioned out of collective historical

experience. The cumulative weight of these ideas builds up into a *script* that is imbued with a larger moral vision among protestors to a distinct social project called *modernity*. What began as Rizal's execution in 1896 at the Luneta Park was the clamour for a modern Philippine state, free from the clutches of an oppressive colonialism of five centuries, free from the stranglehold of the traditional forces of the Catholic Church and its colonial handmaidens, the Spanish friars.^v In the twenty-first century, this same moral vision continues, but reworked to suit the requirements of a global era. In between these hundred years, two uprisings occurred, one in 1986 to end the dictatorial regime of Ferdinand Marcos, and the second in 2001, after a failed impeachment trial of Joseph Estrada on charges of economic plunder and culpable violation of the Constitution.^{vi} An uninterrupted historical line of resistance is spurred on by generations of Filipinos who view the process of building a state and a nation according to the dictates of modernity. Protestors in 2013 continue to be imbued with the moral vision of modernity and were far more mindful of the globalizing ethos that underpins the meaning of nationhood. This protest spawned through social media reflected their aspiration that the Philippine state conforms to the rigorous demands of a modern nation within a globalizing framework. Protest scripts form part of the "universe of discourse" (Mead, 1934) that includes ideas, images, symbols, and emotions. Protestors utilise these to facilitate their communication with greater ease through cyber-technologies and are crucial ingredients in their protest repertoire to achieve dramaturgical protest effects.

Finally, I argue the role of emotions in protest, a key ingredient in dramaturgical performances, very central to the "cultural turn" in social movement theory. Following Gamson (1992, p. 32), whose "injustice frames" and "injustice framing" constitute far less cognitive schemes to understand the rights and wrongs of the world, but rather "the righteous anger that puts fire in the belly and iron in the soul," emotions heighten consciousness and solidarity among protestors, and assists in identity formation.

All these processes occur in cyberspace but utilise

traditional media as well. Whatever the current technological context, these processes are central to protest. Protestors utilise available technologies to create and augment dramaturgical effects. This essay illustrates the use of cyber-technologies as a crucial resource among activists for mobilisation and facilitates the connection between cyber protest cultures and public protest space.

Protest as Social Drama

One of the most adventurous ideas to emerge in sociological theory is the view of social life as "theatre," as a show to be staged, where characters perform and interpret their roles. This is not to deny the authenticity of their performances, but rather, to recognise that everyday life offers numerous opportunities for selecting the roles they choose to enact. Protest as performance is no different.

Drawing its inspiration from Erving Goffman's (1959) classic work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, the dramaturgical perspective's foremost concern is *meaning-making* which results from "behavioural consensus" among human beings through their interaction with each other and with objects in their environment. Here, meaning is viewed not a "state of consciousness or as a set of organised relations existing or subsisting mentally outside the field of experience into which they enter. . . ." (Mead, 1934, p. 78) but rather, as a "behaviourally, socially emergent, problematic variable, and in fact (is an) arbitrary, concoction of human interaction . . . a completely tentative and contingent phenomenon" (Peribanayagam, 1985, p. 26).

Conceived as a "series of performances" located in the region of "public acts" rather than in "people's heads" (Brissett & Edgley, 1990, p.36), dramaturgical conceptions of social life counter the excessive formalism of structural-functionalist sociology, which has long dominated the social sciences. A dramaturgical view rescues human life from what Peter Berger (1963, p. 51) calls the "tyrannical demands" of social structures, providing human beings with a large measure of ingenuity "capable of circumventing and subverting even the most elaborate control system (and

is a refreshing antidote to sociologicistic depression.”

Protest as dramaturgical performances require scripting processes (Benford & Hunt, 1992, p.36) as a key technique for protestors in their efforts to construct and communicate power. Due to the differences in meaning over a specific aspect of reality, protestors are aware that they must address these differences by shaping perceptions, offering explanations and alternatives and ensuring that their agenda is advanced and emphasized. Scripting processes also “define the scene, identify the actors, and outline expected behavior” (Benford & Hunt, 1992, p.38). They are not rigid texts; rather they function as guidelines that provide behavioural cues, sufficiently broad to allow for improvisation.

Scripting oftentimes begins with casting, i.e., the enrolment of the protagonists and antagonists — both sets of actors in the drama which “compete to affect audiences’ interpretations of power in a variety of domains, including those pertaining to religious, political, economic or lifestyle arrangements” (Benford & Hunt, 1992, p.38). Scripting processes entail the development of *dramatis personae* and thus, the subsequent enlistment of appropriate roles. In the theatre of social movement drama, the “demonisation” of certain characters is apparent very early on, portraying them as evil personified, have violated cultural norms, abused power, and identified as the cause of whatever ails society. Juxtaposed against the antagonists are the heroes/heroines and/or potential or unwitting victims who represent purity and innocence, and may embody the higher ideals of the social movement. This polarisation results in the construction of the dramatic problem according to two distinct positions, and provides the audience with a neat categorization of moral and political choices. Without these two sets of *dramatis personae*, there is no social movement drama (Benford & Hunt, 1992). Finally, there is the audience — the Greek chorus — including the media. This is the cast of potential thousands and millions of protestors who join in the drama to deliver a blockbuster performance. Alongside is the media who help in creating and strengthening what every protest drama ultimately is: a version of some “morality play” whose good versus evil themes is a long-

standing formula that continues to enrapt the audiences, whether these be enacted in the cinema, in the theatre or in protest venues.

A hundred years ago, the protagonist (*bida*) was fairly clear — a neatly dressed, soft-spoken scholar, well-educated in Europe, spoke four languages, a doctor who saw patients while in exile, a writer and poet. Finally, a man executed for his political beliefs and thereafter, provoked a revolution that won the Philippines its independence however temporarily and fleetingly. The antagonists were the Spanish friars and the *guardia civil* — those potent symbols of oppression, the root cause of all social ills, the personification of brutality, cruelty, and bondage. In Rizal’s novels that reflected everyday life during the colonial period, they were easy caricatures in the anti-colonial drama. With the arrival of film and television, the re-enactment of Jose Rizal’s life continues to hold sway in the Philippine imagination. The continuous reincarnation of the themes of love and sacrifice occasioned by Rizal’s life and death through communications technology, whether via film or social media, is fertile ground for constructing and re-constructing protest dramas. In this sense, Jose Rizal was the “original copy”, the prototype, the first ever Filipino protestor who would provide an image to emulate and approximate for succeeding heroes/victims.

In 2013, the protagonist was Benhur Luy Lim, a young personal assistant and nephew to Janet Napoles Lim who turned whistleblower when he went missing for several months and was rescued by the National Bureau of Investigation when his parents reported his disappearance. Hidden in a high-end condominium in one of Napoles’ many high-valued real estate properties until his rescue, Benhur Luy Lim emerged as innocence personified. The deepening investigation and the daily barrage on social media set the stage for scripting the protest that was indeed rife with dramatic material. Like Jose Rizal, he was young and literate, savvy with the internet, shy and soft-spoken, but straight-shooting in his replies during the Senate hearings. He named names — a rare act of courage that so often elude witnesses who only wish to protect their interests. He exuded an air of simplicity, like most of the victimized taxpayers whose money was

defrauded by a grand diversion scheme. Unlike Jose Rizal, however, he wasn't flawless. The antagonists did their part to demolish him and painted him as an unreliable drug-user. He did, however, strut into the Senate investigative hearings with a retinue of armed soldiers and he wore a bullet-proof vest. Filipinos who watched the proceedings on television witnessed this as electrifying drama, better than any courtroom scene in a television series, because this was live and this was non-fiction!

The antagonists (*contrabida*) were equally obvious and easy to construct in cyberspace. Daily postings on Facebook detailed the amassed wealth of Janet Napoles Lim and her frivolous daughter, along with three senators who allegedly received the biggest amounts of pork barrel funnelled to fake NGOs. As objects of online vilification, they were given nicknames to facilitate their identities to the public: *Sexy, Tanda* and *Pogi* — a short-cut to refer to three senators who have been demonised in the pork barrel scam. A paper trail going back to at least ten years that wound up in several government ministries and agencies revealed a well-orchestrated scheme of fraud, embezzlement and bureaucratic kleptocracy. In sharp contrast to her nephew the whistleblower, Janet Napoles Lim did not divulge any information, instead, relied on her lawyers to manoeuvre the complex terrain of Senate hearings with legalese, designed to protect herself and possibly her political patrons.

Political action is highly symbolic and expressive. Because communication is central to politics, symbols are a vital currency in this process. They form an "important part of the political heritage and traditions that define the political culture of a community" (Elder & Cobb, 1983, p. 9). Kertzer (1988, pp. 5-8) argues for the potency of symbols in the construction of political reality, especially in acquiring and maintaining power. Further, symbols "instigate social action and define the individual's sense of self" and are vehicles through which people are able to make sense of the political realities, what Edelman (1964: 5) calls the monitoring of the "passing parade of abstract symbols." Protests are highly dependent upon the mobilisation of symbols. They efficiently condense meanings, unifying their diversity and richness, thus

providing simultaneity of ideas that interact in the individual's mind. They are "multivocal" (Kertzer, 1988, p.11).

In the aftermath of Jose Rizal's execution, the Philippine revolution broke out. The very first act of the revolutionaries in declaring the revolution against Spain was the tearing up of the *cedula* (the community tax certificate) — a symbolic act that they no longer needed to register in a country they considered their own. A torn *cedula* constituted the first step in claiming citizenship. So did the establishment of a national insurgent government headed by Andres Bonifacio, the leader of the secret revolutionary society, the *Katipuan*. These symbols permeate throughout Philippine history. If Filipinos today remember anything at all about their revolution, it is the execution of Jose Rizal at Luneta Park and the Cry of Pugad Lawin in which Andres Bonifacio urged all his followers to tear up their certificates.

The biggest political symbol of course was the Luneta Park — the site of what Hare and Kressel (2001: 9) call an "illud tempus", a place where a significant era began. At the park, new political meanings have been created and these have endured over one hundred years. Luneta is "centre stage" for Philippine social and political life. It has become the site for hundreds of thousands of Filipinos who flocked to the park as a kind of pilgrimage. But it is also an internal journey for those who wish to review their heritage on the same spot where Jose Rizal was executed, and thereby experience a social and political renewal. Those who have gone on this journey to the *illud tempus* view their society through the lens of history, and the personal meanings unleashed by Rizal's execution — that of sacrifice, love of country and the necessity for change.

Off protest, Filipinos come to Luneta Park as a social venue to meet, to relax, to promenade as in the colonial days, to court and flirt, to exercise, to while away the tropical days. It is open to everyone no matter one's station in life. The park is a gathering place for being reminded of one's identity, an open site which belongs to no one and therefore belongs to everyone. On the spot where Jose Rizal was executed a century earlier, the Park serves as a historical

repository of collective sentiment — a time and place when Filipinos ceased to be colonial subjects, instead became historical agents.

The Script of Modernity

Beyond the scripting and staging processes of protest is the script itself (Hare & Blumberg, 1988, p. 58). Akin to what Snow and Benford (1992, p. 139) terms a “master frame,” a dramatic script is more than an “interpretative schema” (Goffman, 1974, p. 21). A script encompasses the full array of “basic sensibilities . . . part affect, part moral vision, part cognitive beliefs” (Jaspers, 1997, p. 154), at the same time it contains a “universe of discourse” that include the “most complete set of directions for social behaviour . . . where the interaction of each of the actors is specified as the play is developed through a series of acts” (Hare: 18). Scripts are “built upon ‘frames’ . . . [and] encompasses all various framing activities and alignment strategies, . . . attempt to integrate and coordinate movement activity. . . and moves these ideas one step closer to enactment. (*Ibid*). As interpretative schemes, frames tend to remain in the purely cognitive realm, whereas scripts accommodate the more behavioural and affective components of protest. Scripts, in short, fill in the gap in our understanding of the dynamics at work in protest activism, as well as the discursive foundations upon which those dynamics rest.

Embedded in these processes is a “moral vision” which serves to organise and transform Philippine social life, what Benford and Hunt (1992, p. 41) term the “direction for appropriate performances.” I use the term “modernity” to encapsulate a moral vision that would serve as the cornerstone for all activities, values, beliefs, emotions, sentiments, meanings, ideas; a “map” to provide direction to all cognition, emotion and action; finally, an intellectual, moral and emotional reservoir of all discursive and non-discursive elements. I submit that this outlook towards the world is *the* “super-arching” script that instigates and sustains protest and collective action in the Philippines, a barometer against which all advancements, as well

as regressions in Philippine social life, are measured, a collective version of what the Filipino sociologist Randolph David (2002) terms “utopian politics.” Over a hundred years, this script has endured in the saga of our national life and has kept movement activists focused.

Modernity as an outlook is as old as the history of thought itself. It has a 2,500 year-old ancestry, or so Almond et. al. (1960, p. ix) claim, although modernity, and more pointedly, “progress”, is said to date back to the eighteenth century Enlightenment period in which the values of science, rationality, and secularism finally triumphed over religion and the “divine right” doctrine. Even Marxist thinking that proselytized violent revolution to pave the way for the ultimate communist society was not exempt from an intellectual strain which celebrated a linear notion of human progress and projected an optimism in the capacity of science to solve all human problems.

In the context of the developing world, modernity came to be regarded as a process of supplanting traditional structures and practices for modern ones. Mostly, it was a process of becoming Western, and those countries which subscribed to the “modernisation project” signed up in support of the corresponding institutions and belief systems and behaviours that would enlist them in the ranks of the “modern” nations. Social progress as a universal aspiration in all developing countries has achieved the status of what Alfred Meyer (1982, p. 84) calls “a possible dream and a categorical moral imperative.”

In political life, the modernisation project took on the form of the state, not in Marxist terms as the instrument of the ruling class, but as the

consolidation and rationalization of rule . . . a political organism unprecedented in the amount and quality of human effort it could activate, in its ability to monitor and control a multitude of aspects of social existence of vast populations, in the regularity, continuity, and efficiency of its operations (Poggi, 1982, p. 348).

The progressive state, therefore, embodies the highest aspirations of a nation’s political life, and state officials as the carriers and vessels of these aspirations.

It would supplant the “arbitrariness, wilfulness, brutality and partiality” of prior arrangements based upon “private power of disposition”; in its stead was the exercise of objectivity, impersonality, and rationality on which would be erected the modern state (*Ibid.*).

It is this rationalist, modernist conception of the state that revved up the engines of the social movements to protest against the pork barrel. The private capture through a well-oiled scheme of institutional theft and extortion constituted what James Jasper (1997) refers to as “moral shock” — a transgression of the boundaries of civility and decency, a crossing of red lines, an assault to collective notions of righteousness and the corresponding behaviours that are expected from fellow citizens and their elected leaders. It likewise reminded Philippine activists that the Philippine state is a continuing “work in progress.” However imperfect the state had functioned in the last one hundred years since the interrupted revolution of 1896, the slow and tedious institutionalisation of public life was indeed occurring, and a measure of accountability and transparency in the nation’s democracy could be expected. Further, the Philippines had joined a global community, many of its members were modern nations. Despite policy and procedural differences among advocates, activists, and policy-makers, there was a general agreement that the path to modernity through active citizen’s engagement was the preferred route. For sure, a layer of civil society organisations consisting of non-government organisations and social movements “thickened” and expanded. Under a democratic framework, albeit imperfect and incomplete, this feature of Philippine political life had been enshrined and it would take a massive counterforce to affect their demobilisation.

Alongside the script of modernity was the notion of *rights* and *responsibility*. Though certainly not new within the context of a global political discourse, Coclanis and Bruchey (1999, p. 3) consider it of “recent coinage”, the political import of which dates back to the 1830s, not coincidentally during the era of liberal reformism in Europe. The word’s lineage is aligned with that of “free will, accountability, answerability,

and imputability”. Its political significance, however, lies in the social and historical circumstances within which the term came to be noticed and used. The notion of responsibility was accompanied by

...rising standards of accountability in government, triggered by the democratic revolutions in America and France, or more broadly in response to an escalating sense of human agency, fostered not only by political events, but also by economic development and the accelerating pace of technological innovation in societies increasingly oriented to the market (Coclanis & Bruchey, 1999, p. 3).

Thus, much like the struggle for Philippine independence, the protest against the pork barrel constitutes a highly charged political contest for a redefinition of political meanings that took on a widened appreciation of citizenship within the context of an expanded political milieu — one that encompassed the reality of a global polity and the return to democracy in many countries in the world. Democracy was refigured from *rights* to *responsibilities*, more specifically the responsibility of public leaders to subscribe and adhere to the notion of public accountability, and submit to the practice of transparent governance.

These aspirations for a modern state continue to be railroaded by a form of authority that rests on traditional domination where the weight of customary rules and behaviours are in direct contradiction with the requirements of a progressive state. Part of these rules includes the right to exercise personal discretion and an unstated acceptance of prerogatives. Further, officials in authority exercise these prerogatives not through a formal set of rules but rather through “good will.” The administrative apparatus that corresponds to this type of domination Weber termed as patrimonialism, a form of domination

...based on a ‘system of favorites’ who perform functions for rulers out of loyalty or obligation. Individuals who occupy official positions are invariably personal followers of the master. This form of administration leads to arbitrary decision making which follows the personal discretion of the master, rather than to a strict set of administrative rules which apply equally to everyone. (Morrison, 1997, p. 289).

Thus, the modernity script stands as a direct challenge to the traditional one, and protest examines and expands these contending scripts. Given the expressivism of Philippine political life, these contestations over worldviews are achieved with dramaturgical effects, and the processes of scripting and staging enables scholars to understand the dynamics of movement participation, particularly, “the social construction and communication of meaning, including formulating roles and characterizations, managing performance regions, controlling information, sustaining dramatic tensions, and orchestrating emotions” (Benford & Hunt, 1992, p. 37).

Place, Cyberspace and Emotions

Most protest literature provides descriptive accounts of places where protest occurs, treating spaces as backdrops to the main event (Sewell, 2001, p. 51). A few studies, however, are emerging on ‘geographies of struggle’ (Staeheli, 1994), defined as “associated spatial practices necessary for oppositional movements to thwart the forces, strategies and plans that are imposed on marginalized people and places.” Reiff (2000, p. 12) considers space as flexible boundaries, thus ‘can be conceptualized again and again.’ Each reconceptualisation occurs with corresponding shifts in social relations, often through social contests that foreground race and class relations.

Control of protest space provides an interesting perspective on the historical evolution of space. Protestors naturally tend to appropriate sites linked to specific struggles. Boundaries, physical and symbolic, are tightly drawn around them, lending these an aura of untouchability. Memorials erected in honour of martyrs and heroes stamp these spaces, and they acquire history. They become repositories of collective memory and assume significant symbolic status that tends toward permanence. The Luneta Park is one such physical arena that has been imbued, over a hundred years, of this specific aura.

Protest space additionally requires attention to ‘copresence’ (Giddens, 1984 as cited in Sewell, 2001, p. 57). This includes the bodily force of numbers, time-distance conditions, and response time management.

In geographies of resistance, protest momentum is crucial to achieve visibility through force of numbers, to achieve ‘collective efflorescence’ (Durkheim, 1995), and to demonstrate a show of strength to the counter-resistance forces.

The choice of the Luneta Park is not accidental. Protesters deliberately chose it as a site for reconfiguring social spaces imbued with political meanings that transcend time. Like Jose Rizal over one hundred years ago, whose clamour for independence from Spain urged on a revolution shortly after his death, the pork barrel scam likewise urges the Filipinos to continue the unfinished revolution of 1896. Luneta Park is the “center stage” for the enactment of nation-building, a site for “spatial agency” (Sewell, 2001, p. 55) that becomes a locus for creatively addressing the tension between structure and agency. The tradition of Luneta Park as a site of parades, promenades, processions and executions during the Spanish colonial era continues to the present day (minus the executions). Yet, it also has been augmented into a “dramaturgical protest space,” a resource for protesters to utilise space for political and social struggles that thereby produce new meanings, new uses and new relations.

In more recent history, the Luneta Park was also the site for Corazon Aquino’s ascension to power via a popular uprising in 1986. On 16 February 1986, a day after the snap election, Corazon Aquino held a rally at the Luneta Park, drawing an estimated crowd of one million people, a turn-out that could only signal the curtains were about to drop on the regime of then President Ferdinand Marcos. In August 2009, when Corazon Aquino passed away, some twenty-five years after the 1986 uprising, the Luneta Park was once again the site of the funeral cortege where millions of Filipinos stood for several hours to pay their respects to the woman whom they called the “icon of democracy.”

“It’s like that time all over again,” said one of the mourners who, twenty-five years ago, stood at Luneta Park to witness Corazon Aquino claim her electoral victory and hence her impending presidency.^{vii}

But the park is more than just a vessel that contains the historical memories of a nation in protest.

In the words of David Cole (1975, p. 7), the shrine is the embodiment of an “*illud tempus*”,

...a time of origins, the period of Creation and just after, when gods walked the earth, men visited the sky, and the great archetypal events of myth — war in heaven, battles with monsters, the Quest, the Flood, the Fall — took place.

For Filipinos, EDSA means a gathering place for the expression of a collective sentiment. It is more importantly, an era when it all began, a symbol of a “political cosmology” in which Filipino society was said to have truly emerged, not out of the artificial demarcations that were the outcome of manoeuvrings among competing colonial powers of the past, but from the action of millions of anonymous citizens who took the first tentative steps at crafting their own nation. For a country whose five-hundred year history was a series of colonial misadventures, political let-downs and bungled attempts at nationhood, the execution of Rizal at Luneta Park marked a grandiose departure from an overburdened colonial past. For once in five centuries, Filipinos experienced the nation a tangible possibility, an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1991) with which to display to the world the results of their own handiwork.

In the 21st century, this imagining continues in cyberspace. Digital activists continue to build a nation through the technologies of social media. In cyberspace, the mobilisation of symbols, images and emotions to create a dramaturgical protest is far easier, thanks to the nature of communications technology itself that can easily compress messages and deliver them with speed. As the pork barrel scam unfolded, online activists found vast territories for playfulness with the term itself, and the accompanying images were delightful, emotionally-charged and politically-loaded.

Among the emotions that were quickly elicited in cyber-space was anger and disbelief toward Jeanne Napoles, the daughter of Janet Napoles Lim. Images of her with Justin Bieber, a pose in a limousine, a lavish party, and a lifestyle of expensive shopping quickly mobilised cyber-outrage, particularly in light of unfolding information that this unbelievably ostenta-

tious and vulgar lifestyle were financed by Filipino citizens who were conscientiously paying taxes. It was also a disbelief in the propagated myth that the Philippines was a “poor” country. As trillions of pesos were siphoned off through pork barrel allocations, it became apparent that the country was suffering less from capital shortage than it was from financial mismanagement. Online activists began posting policy questions as to the rationale for continued borrowing from international financial institutions in a situation where tax collection seemed rather sufficient to finance the operations of the economy. Online activists moved into quick gear to fill in the gaps in understanding the workings of the economy: the reason for the continued underdevelopment of the country was less due to its inherent nature of poverty than it was to the plundering behaviour of politicians who showed no qualms in looting the economy through layers of bureaucratic manoeuvrings. This process of “injustice framing” (Gamson, 1992, p. 32) took on both elements: the mobilisation of outrage and the cognitive dimension of policy analysis.

Emotions, according to the anthropologist Michelle Rosaldo (quoted in McAdam, 1999, p. 6), are “embodied thoughts, thoughts seeped with the apprehension that ‘I am involved.’” Further, Rosaldo (1980, p. 35) elaborates on strong emotions such as anger and outrage as “a sign of social import because cultural practice generates such affects as will guarantee the constraining force of social norms upon the self.” Crucial to the study of collective action is Lyman’s earlier contention that emotions, particularly anger, serve a political purpose when these are viewed not merely as expressions, but as “meanings.” Treated phenomenologically, emotions become vehicles for “self-understanding and understanding of the world . . . as a dialectic of self and world” (Rosaldo, 1980, p.61).

Emotions, likewise, assist in forming protest consciousness, which refers to “the mesh between cognition and culture – between individual beliefs about the social world and cultural belief systems and ideologies” (Gamson, 1992, p. 65). These cognitions involve the articulation of ideas, ideologies and frames. Protestors have to state explicit goals and make

proposals. They need to craft programs and provide alternatives. But beyond cognition is the force or emotions that are necessary for recruitment into the movement, to spur people to action, to sustain interest. Protestors follow a “gut feel” about what they consider to be bad or wrong. But they likewise need to fill a “cognitive vacuum” simultaneously, to give flesh to their actions, to help them construct the meaning behind their feelings and translate these into a language that they share and understand with others. Consciousness-raising, thus, involves the articulation of cognitive beliefs as much as it involves a sense of outrage over injustice.

Further, emotions help construct identity (Gamson, 1992, p. 14). Collective identity is central to all social movements, in large part because of the negotiated process of constructing a sense of “we-ness” that permeates the entire movement, without which, the amassing of large numbers of people would merely constitute a crowd or a mob. Melucci (1989) argues that a collective identity provides both strategic and personal goals. A collective identity makes possible the organisation of “mass energy” which would otherwise remain unharnessed without it. At the same time, it provides a sense of personal loyalty, commitment, and even pleasure, all of which help sustain a high level of participation even in times of, and especially during, moments of inactivity and demobilisation.

Finally, emotions create solidarity especially among unorganised individuals who joined the protest even without social movement affiliations. The intensity of solidarity created among networks as well as among individuals is a “glue” that holds the protestors together. The role of emotions in the creation and sustenance of “prefigurative politics” is a crucial element in understanding the longevity and staying-power of these protestors even after a generation has passed since the uprising of 1986.

These processes constitute part of the “emotional infrastructure” of protest. Anti-pork barrel activists, outraged over the scam, created solidarity among taxpayers quickly. Non-social movement protestors understood the scam quickly and easily. There was no need for extensive policy discussions to mobilise the

Million People March. Out of this solidarity was a collective identity fashioned online. A Facebook group called Anonymous Incorporated served as an open platform for anyone who wished to participate in online discussion, and also keep themselves posted. But beyond these identity- and solidarity-building functions were proposed alternatives: declare the Priority Development Assistance Fund (PDAF), also known as pork barrel, as unconstitutional and remove it altogether from the government budget. The internet campaign moved to the Supreme Court for a decision on its unconstitutionality. As online activism flourished and anti-pork advocates stepped up the pressure, the Supreme Court voted the unconstitutionality of the PDAF on 19 November 2013. This was a temporary victory for cyber- and on-the-ground activists alike.

Conclusion: The Perils and the Promise of Dramaturgy

In this essay, I discussed the dramatic techniques of scripting and staging for protest. Both processes are analytical tools that help scholars understand the internal dynamics of social movements. They are, likewise, useful strategies in the arsenal of activists to create and sustain protest as social dramas. I argued that protest, as social dramas, derive from a broader intellectual tradition called “cultural constructionism”, at the core of which is the notion of *meaning-making* among human beings.

By relying on Goffman’s dramaturgical approach to social life, I argued that protests are dramatic performances that are scripted and staged through the enlistment of *dramatis personae*, particularly the creation of protagonists and antagonists that set up neat categorizations of political and moral choices — a personification of themes and images to establish differences in perceptions of reality and to communicate power.

These, however, are enacted on a stage. In this essay, Luneta Park is the centre stage for protest, a site that dates to at least a hundred years old when the first execution against Jose Rizal, the national hero, became an enduring symbol of struggle against

oppression and exploitation. The symbolic quality of the park remains to this day, and Filipinos revere the park as a receptacle for collective sentiment, a continuing reminder of what the park has represented for over a century — the unfinished revolution of 1896.

I also discussed the formation of “actable ideas” for protest. I elaborated on the script of “modernity” as a “worldview.” While images, symbols and emotions serve to mobilise collective action, it is the script that gives the most elaborate set of directions for the enactment of protest. At the same time, the modernity script was constituted by the protestors’ moral vision, aspirations, sentiments, intuitions, feelings and ideas, all of which would sustain them. Without this, the power of the images and the themes would saturate the performance and the action would have fizzled out, very similar to movie productions that bombard the audience with images and themes, but provide little or no redemptive value in the larger messages they propagate or the moral visions that they might suggest. The social and political project embedded in the modernity script was a straightforward commitment to an ongoing process of social transformation for Philippine society. These ideas have their historical roots that date back to the opening of the Philippines in the mid-18th century and continue to dominate public discourse.

Finally, I connect cyber-activism to public space. Cyber-activists, likewise, utilise the dramatic techniques suggested by Benford and Hunt (1992), as they would with the available technologies. The campaign for the *Million People March* at the Luneta Park happened online as much as it did rely on traditional modes of communication. Yet the images and symbols that were mobilised to support the protest were the same, and the utilisation of social media facilitated their swift transfer. Those other cyber-activists who could not be present at the Luneta Park mounted their own cyber-protest. As far as Saudi Arabia, overseas Filipinos posted their protest on Facebook and Twitter subscribers followed the event at Luneta Park.

Dramaturgy is a theoretical perspective that upholds the creativity of the human process and the centrality of the human subject as a conscious, meaning-making actor in a social context. Dramatur-

gical interpretations, however, do not go far enough to constitute itself into “a device through which the social relations of the dramaturgical society are maintained or can be altered (Young & Massey, 1977, p. 78). As a hermeneutic interpretation of social life, dramaturgy can provide the tools with which to construct social scripts, including their symbols and images, that are culturally resonant and receptive to an audience. But the danger of dramaturgy lies in its amoral use, i.e., in the equal availability of the dramaturgical repertoire to activists and con artists alike, to protestors as well as publicists, to challengers as well as communication specialists. Duncan (1965, p. xxii) terms the latter as “tribal magicians” who, as the anointed high priests of public relations, are able to control the social construction process, including those repressive and fraudulent versions that abound in urban life (Young & Massey, 1977, p. 78). Beyond the celebration of the theatricality of human life is an admonition to transcend the “image-mongering” (Brissett & Edgley, 1990, p. 348) tendencies within dramaturgy, to engage the perspective according to the Habermasian dictum of an “emancipatory interest of science.” Welsh (1985, p. 399) calls for converting dramaturgy into an “immanent critique”, to expose the “mystifications of (the) social relations based on class and power,” to utilise dramatic techniques in the service of “making visible the flaws of life”, on which the process of social construction and reconstruction must be based. A critical dramaturgy moves beyond episodic performances, what Young and Massey (1977) refer to as the “short-take society.” In societies where media plays a central role in the shaping of political meanings, these episodes are frequently reduced to “sound bites” and televised quips. The result is a dramaturgical society in which politics becomes the province of those who can master the terrain of show-biz culture, and can transform public debates into a series of sound bites. The latter become the basis for judging political ability and commitment rather than the propagation of a coherent political and moral vision that encompasses the widest intersubjective consensus. In the “short-take society”, Cole’s “imaginative truth” (1975) has disappeared. In its place are rampant image-mongering and the competition for

saleable symbols and snappy sound bites. In the words of Welsh (2005), a humanitarian and liberating vision requires “the overthrow of fraudulent dramaturgy requires not merely the abolition of certain instruments of mystification but the transformation of social relations of communications, property and power.”

The triumph of the abolition of the pork barrel fund is a case in point: it illustrates the temporary nature of this triumph. It likewise demonstrates the fragility of the wider political system despite the pronouncements of the Supreme Court. In the wake of the declared unconstitutionality of the Priority Development Assistance Fund (PDAF), a new fund was quickly created by the legislators called the Supplemental Fund intended for the victims of Typhoon Haiyan. The names have changed, the intent remains the same. These are funds that are allocated to the legislators without the need for executive oversight. In anticipation of the Supreme Court decision, legislators drafted the Supplemental Fund in advance.^{viii} Also, in the wake of the discovery of Janet Napoles Lim, another female counterpart operating within the judicial system has been uncovered and identified. Known simply as “Ma’am Arlene,” she has become known as a “decision-fixer” who works with judges and justices to influence their judicial decisions in favour of her clients as well as the sale of Temporary Restraining Orders (TROs).^{ix}

The unfinished nature of the Philippine state couldn’t have been more poignantly illustrated by history itself. The 1896 revolutionaries proclaimed their victory from Spain and declared the first Republic all throughout Asia, including the framing of a Constitution by a revolutionary congress that would establish Philippine sovereignty. The constitution of the new republic was approved on 26 November 1898. Yet, barely a month later, the Americans signed the Treaty of Paris that would end hostilities between Spain and America. The ‘sale’ of the Philippine Islands was formally signed between the two powers on 10 December 1898. For a paltry sum of 20 million dollars, the United States acquired Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Philippines. The direct and armed intervention of the United States and Spain’s complete disre-

gard over the triumphant victory of the Philippine revolution resulted in the abortion of the first independent republic ever to exist in Asia. In the words of historian Leon Wolff, “it was . . . a gift. Spain accepted it. Quite irrelevantly she handed us the Philippines. No question of honour or conquest was involved. The Filipino people had nothing to say about it, although their rebellion was thrown in (so to speak) free of charge.”^x

Activists have a long struggle ahead of them. History has dealt present and future activists their protest material. It is not only the final dismantling of a political system that systemically breeds corruption that lies at the centre of Philippine activism, it is the quest for a moral vision that hails the modern progressive nation-state as its crowning aspiration.

Endnotes

ⁱ Translated as The Philippine League. Among its reformist aims were: 1) unification of the archipelago; 2) mutual protection; 3) defence against violence and injustice; 4) encouragement of instruction, agriculture and commerce; and 5) study and application of reforms. See Teodoro Agoncillo. *History of the Filipino People*.

ⁱⁱ Pork barrel is a term that refers to lump-sum funds allocated directly to Philippine legislators that allows them to spend without going through the normal budgetary process or the Executive Branch. Because of the lack of oversight and widely discretionary character, the pork barrel has been a constant irritation in Philippine politics and is often considered as a source of abuse and corruption. It is formally known as the Priority Development Assistance Fund (PDAF). Each member of the House of Representatives is allocated PhP 70 million per year (approximately USD 1.5 million) and each member of the Philippine Senate is given PhP 200 million (USD 4.5 million). See Pork Barrel. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pork_barrel (accessed on 13 January 2014).

ⁱⁱⁱ The Philippine uprising of February 1986 deposed Ferdinand Marcos after 21 years in power and installed Corazon Aquino as President. The uprising

was occasioned by an electoral victory which Corazon Aquino had won in a snap election but was denied by Marcos through a manipulation of the electoral results. Defection of top military leaders and the mobilization from the Archbishop of the Philippines led to a massive turn-out of people. The Philippine uprising is considered as the forerunner of subsequent peaceful non-violent uprisings in other parts of the world, notably South Korea, Myanmar, China, and Eastern Europe albeit with different outcomes.

^{iv} Benford and Hunt identify four processes, namely, 1) scripting; 2) staging; 3) performing; and 4) interpreting. For purposes of this essay, I discuss the first two in support of my central arguments about the role of space and the underlying ideas that galvanize collective energies for protest.

^v Note that Philippine colonization was carried out by the Spanish friars who stayed the longest, rather than administrators-cum-merchants who tended to leave quickly once their fortunes were made. As dominant figures in the colonization process, these priests and curates were considered the architects of the colonial edifice and the pillars of a theocratic society. See Renato Constantino (1978:31).

^{vi} A full account of three Philippine uprisings and their underlying scripts can be found in Teresita Cruz-del Rosario (2009) *Scripted Clashes: A Dramaturgical Approach to Three Philippine Uprisings*. DM Verlag.

^{vii} Barbara Mae Dacanay. "Massive Turnout as Corazon Aquino's Cortege Retraces 1986 'People Power' Route." 3 August 2009. *Gulfnews.com*. <http://m.gulfnews.com/massive-turnout-as-corazon-aquino-s-cortege-retraces-1986-people-power-route-1.533983> (accessed on 12 January 2014).

^{viii} Joseph Santolan. 21 November 2013. "Philippine Supreme Courts declared pork barrel funds unconstitutional." *World Socialist Web Site*. <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2013/11/21/phil-n21.html> (accessed on 13 January 2014)

^{ix} Eric Sauler and Nancy C. Carvajal. 13 December 2013. "Alleged 'fixer' in Judiciary identified." *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/545435/alleged-fixer-in-judiciary-identified> (accessed on 13 January 2014)

^x Philippines — the Malolos Constitution and the Treaty of Paris http://www.mongabay.com/history/philippines/philippines_the_malolos_constitution_and_the_treaty_of_paris.html#yCMq6omv6g42MjFI.99 (accessed on 14 January 2014).

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