

# Book Reviews

**Hedman, Eva-Lotta. (2006). *In the name of civil society: From free election movements to People Power in the Philippines*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 268 pages.**

The Philippines is considered to have one of the most vibrant, plural, dense, and politicized civil societies having a long history of being an active sphere of collective action and an arena for contentious politics. To a large extent, different groups belonging to civil society have been at the forefront of the country's struggles for good governance, social justice, and sustainable development. Since the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolt that toppled down a dictatorship, civil society mobilization is increasingly occupying a prominent role in contemporary Philippine politics.

This book is an effort to critically examine the politics behind the creation, evolution, and activation of "civil society" by looking at the mobilization of "free election" movements such as the National Movement for Free Elections (Namfrel). It challenges the existing scholarship on civil society in three ways. First, by using a post-colonial approach, Hedman traces the deep history of Philippine civil society beyond the anti-dictatorship struggle and the "restoration of democratic rule". Through extensive historical research since the post-war era, she embeds civil society within the larger processes of state and class formation in the Philippines. Second, Hedman employs an alternative theoretical framework drawing on neo-Marxist insights, notably Antonio Gramsci's, in her analysis of free election movements. Previous studies have depended on liberal (e.g., Tocquevillean) approaches which view civil society as an autonomous political actor able to limit state power and exact political accountability. Finally, rather than treat civil

society as a political entity distinct from the state, the author conceptualizes it as an arena of contestation where various groups engage in a perpetual struggle to capture and define its nature and character. To better understand the roots of the power of civil society to mobilize ordinary citizens to adopt its own vision of democracy, citizenship, and morality, Hedman deprives Philippine civil society of any political agency.

Hedman argues that the mobilization of free election movements under the banner of “civil society” in various historical episodes was heavily influenced by the dominant bloc in Philippine politics. Composed of the capitalist class, the Catholic Church, and the United States government, this political alliance provided the necessary resources and power that fueled these movements to mobilize in the name of civil society in periods characterized by a “crisis of authority”. The cycles of contention and mobilization witnessed in 1953, 1969, 1986, and 2001 reflected how these movements have protected and promoted the interests of the dominant bloc under the veneer of liberal democracy, citizenship, and human rights. Hedman’s discussion sheds light on the reasons why other political actors – the left and revolutionary movements – have failed to capture civil society and therefore public imagination and support in these critical moments where challenges against the political order have been mounted.

The book proves its main argument by using several cases following the “most similar” logic of comparison. The first case illustrates how the dominant bloc helped create Namfrel in the 1950s to support the Magsaysay presidential campaign as a way to counteract the political excesses of then president Quirino. Through explicit backing from the US government as well as the assistance of the economic elite and the church, Namfrel was able to successfully mobilize Filipino citizens culminating in the victory of Magsaysay. The dominant bloc used civil society mobilization to counteract the growing Huk movement which propagates a more radical vision of democracy and social justice. On

the other hand, the 1969 crisis emanating from the reelection bid of then president Marcos did not result in a successful mobilization because of the lack of support from the dominant bloc. However, Hedman points out that because of this, other actors such as leftist movements attempted to mobilize in the name of civil society. The declaration of martial law prevented this mobilization from gathering the necessary momentum for political change and without the backing of the dominant bloc, these forces would be the primary recipients of state repression and violence under the Marcos administration. The third case discusses the 1986 crises that ended with the ouster of Marcos through nonviolent collective action once again validated the claim that the support of the dominant bloc is indispensable in order for the mobilization of free election movements to be successful. The book's epilogue uses the same framework to explain the mobilization against Estrada that culminated in his ouster on 2001. In this crisis of authority, the role of the capitalist class and the Church was highlighted more since the US has changed its interventionist disposition in Philippine politics as to be expected given the end of the Cold War.

One of the main strengths of the book is its ability to transcend existing explanations by providing an alternative framework to analyze the role of free election movements mobilizing in the name of civil society in Philippine politics. Civil society is not only unpacked as not a set of organizations but is presented as a socially constructed entity activated during extreme political crises in order to safeguard the interests of the dominant bloc and prevent more radical forces with its transformative goals from capturing the state. The evidence provided by Hedman is backed up by extensive archival documentation as well as field work from different parts of the country. Drawn from the author's doctoral dissertation, the book is tightly argued and embedded within the broader literature on Philippine politics. Finally, Hedman's historically-oriented approach does not prevent the book from coming up with relevant implications for research and policy. For example, she highlights the significance of media in projecting and diffusing civil society

mobilization, given the revolution in information and communications technology. Moreover, understanding the linkages between domestic forces and transnational actors is critical in future mobilizations of organizations within Philippine civil society.

However, there are several points of critique that could be raised. First, Hedman's conclusions about Philippine civil society are derived by studying election movements. Not looking at other groups or associations that could likewise be backed by the dominant bloc but could have the capacity mobilize places some limitations on the generalizability of the book's findings. For example, could other "secondary" associations – those organized along other lines such as gender equality, human rights protection, indigenous people's rights, etc. – better explain the emergence and evolution of civil society mobilization in the Philippines? As already mentioned, the organizations that claim to be part of or represent civil society are diverse in many ways and the influence of other actors in their formation and development could be understood more as a continuum which changes throughout time. Second and related to this, civil society being an instrument of dominant political actors seems to discount the ability of certain organizations to exercise relative autonomy. These organizations are not necessarily agencies of capital accumulation, Christian morality, or US dominance all of the time. If anything, there are organizations, especially those at the grassroots level, that have been able to successfully articulate and further the interests of their communities. The book might have casted its net too broadly and too far that it is supposed to. Finally, it is palpable that the 2001 case did not receive the same treatment as the other episodes of mobilization. One can argue that the role of the dominant bloc has not been prominent vis-à-vis more militant organizations from radical groups or leftist movements. This casts a shadow on the book's main argument, as the mobilization of civil society has a more plural character with alliances being formed from all forces within a political spectrum as seen in the resignation and ouster campaigns against the Arroyo administration.

These observations though do not deprive the book of its impeccable logic and excellent research. It enriches the scholarship on Philippine politics and the comparative literature on civil society in general. As a fine piece of research using a post-colonial approach, the book will be of interest to students of Philippine history, society, and politics. Finally, Hedman's study questions the conventional wisdom prevalent among scholars and practitioners that civil society and democratic politics go hand in hand, as organizations claiming to represent civil society have interests to protect and an agenda to pursue that could be inimical to democracy. Theory and history have proven that this assumption about the democratizing character of civil society is not only erroneous but dangerous as well.

**ARIES A. ARUGAY**

Dept of Political Science  
UP Diliman

