

Kompil II: A Study of Civil Society's Political Engagements

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Abstract

This article presents a case study of the *Kongreso ng Mamamayan Pilipino II* (or Kompil II for short), a civil society formation active in the extra-parliamentary ouster of Philippine President Joseph Ejercito Estrada over charges of grave corruption and abuse of power in January 2001. The study illustrates the highly politicized nature of many Philippine civil society organizations (CSOs). It shows how the Kompil II coalition flexed its political muscle through mass actions, agenda building and alliance work. The research also demonstrates that although Kompil II members were united in their opposition to Estrada, their unity was sutured along two critical lines: (1) whether civil society leaders shall accept government positions and (2) whether CSOs shall endorse or campaign for political aspirants. Divergent outlooks among member organizations, thus, indicate the heterogeneous nature of Philippine civil society. The study concludes that in a political system such as in the Philippines—where political parties are weak and vested elite interests dominate formal politics—more vibrant and transformative political activity is possible *outside* the institutional shell of electoral politics, in civil society gatherings and in the 'parliament of the streets'.

Introduction

The Philippines arguably boasts of one of the most vibrant civil societies in Southeast Asia, if not the rest of the developing world. Civil society developed from several streams: professional and church-led social development work (beginning after World War II), pre-martial law issue-based organizing (beginning with student and urban poor mobilizations in the early 1970s) and the anti-dictatorship struggle (1972 to 1986). Following the overthrow of President Ferdinand Marcos in 1986 and the opening up of considerable democratic space, civil society organizations (CSOs)

have steadily developed and refined their skills at various levels: as advocates of structural reform, implementers of people-centered development, stakeholders in the parliamentary arena and partners in governance. This multiplicity of roles is institutionalized in the Philippine state's legal policy environment: from the 1987 Constitution¹, the Local Government Code of 1991², to a host of laws enshrining civil society consultation, representation and participation³ in policy formulation, implementation and reform⁴.

In the Philippines, civil society is most often mentioned in the same breath as non-government organizations (NGOs)

and people's organizations (POs). Membership-based POs compose civil society's base at the grassroots level. These largely represent the interests of the marginalized masses, like informal vendors associations or tricycle drivers' organizations. The next tier is composed of non-profit organizations, staffed by mostly middle-class NGO professionals, which support the formation and capability-building of POs. Other NGOs are engaged in policy research and advocacy to bring forth so-called 'people's agendas'. These are augmented by academic research institutes, alternative media centers, and civic-oriented professional organizations. Church-based organizations and charismatic movements, which command large memberships, may also be included in this enumeration. NGOs and like-minded civic organizations often forge issue-based coalitions and networks to consolidate campaign and mainstreaming efforts. Peasant federations, student alliances and trade union centers furthermore bespeak of the vocal social movements found in the Philippines.

Records of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) reveal that the Philippines boasted of about 60,000 to 95,000 non-stock, non-profit organizations in the year 2000, compared to 27,100 such entities in 1986. In the absence of a law compelling organizations to register with a national agency, there are thousands more community-based organizations

(CBOs) that are only registered with local government units, if at all. A national survey in 1998 shows that 15.9 percent of Filipino families were affiliated with POs or NGOs (as cited by Racelis 2000:160).

Civil society in the Philippines is not only distinguished by its size or its rich experience in advocacy and organizing. Equally noteworthy is its ascendancy in public life. Civil society organizations of various orientations were instrumental in the ouster of two presidents: People Power I, which put an end to the Marcos regime in 1986, and People Power II fifteen years later, which removed Joseph Ejercito Estrada from office.

The evidently vibrant picture of Philippine civil society invites further scrutiny to reveal more dynamic and contentious relations beneath the surface. This article unravels two strands of one such particular dynamic: the highly politicized nature of Philippine civil society organizations vis-à-vis their ascribed 'civil' characterization. It presents a case study of the *Kongreso ng Mamamayan Pilipino II* (or Kompil II for short), a civil society formation that was one of the protagonists of People Power II. The study shows how civil society organizations that became politically active grappled with the organizational implications of such involvement. In short, the aim of this study is to contextualize the political engagements of Philippine CSOs in light

of the issues and challenges arising from a political crisis situation where 'civil' concern bleeds into 'political' action.

The data for this article was culled from key informant interviews and document review of Kompil II minutes of council meetings and position papers, covering the period from October 2000 to June 2001⁵. The research is limited to events and organizations within Metro Manila, thus not taking into consideration Kompil II activities that took place in other cities across the country.

The first section provides a brief overview of how civil society organizations have become active on issues of national concern over the past decade. The second section reviews various definitions of civil society found in the literature, while the third section delves into Philippine adaptations of the concept, in particular the interconnectedness of development work, popular empowerment and democratization issues. The fourth section chronicles the significance of Kompil II as a coalition. This is followed by a fifth section, which identifies the various ways by which Kompil II acted politically and where member organizations drew 'fault lines' in their political engagements. The conclusion relates the Kompil II experience to the bigger picture of the Philippine democratization process and relevant features of the political system.

Philippine Civil Society and National Politics

Civil society is most commonly defined by what it is not. Unlike the private business sector, it is not motivated by the accumulation of wealth. And unlike the state and political parties, it is not interested in seizing or consolidating political power.

The world over, advocacy and development work are the bastions of civil society activities. From a tradition of charity and disaster relief work, civil society organizations are at the forefront of the struggle for the socio-economic development of marginalized sectors and communities. This is the uncontested terrain of civil society engagement in its non-partisan, 'politically neutral' orientation.

The Philippines, however, presents us with a quite different picture. While it is true that civil society is at the forefront of development work in the country, its political role is the most visible to the public eye. Filipinos have increasingly come to understand civil society to be a political force in times when issues of national importance call for broad-based collective action. The most shining examples here, of course, are People Power I and II.

Especially in the aftermath of People Power II, civil society received its fair share of attention, as important

political appointees of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's cabinet came from civil society. Philippine civil society has, therefore, earned the image of being a source of political pressure. What used to be obscure jargon has become an acceptable way of describing citizens' involvement in public affairs.

Kompil II presents us with a remarkable example of civic concern snowballing into political action. It is named after the coalition that played a pivotal role in the first People Power that ousted Ferdinand Marcos in 1986. Although it included individual People Power 'veterans', most member-organizations of Kompil II were not part of the first Kompil.

Yet even in between these two historic events, civil society—in close collaboration with the Catholic Church—has acted as a significant mobilizing force in what Filipinos like to call the 'parliament of the streets'. During the administration of President Fidel V. Ramos, civil society organizations successfully organized demonstrations against his charter change design aimed at eliminating the single six-year term limit of the president. Then again in August to September 1999, massive street rallies across the country aborted Estrada's version of reforming the constitution dubbed 'Constitutional Correction for Development'. Estrada's attempts at silencing broadsheets critical of his administration, notably the *Manila*

Times and *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, likewise resulted in protest actions across civil society and sectors.

Philippine media has quickly caught on to this image of civil society as an articulator of political messages—often dramatic, invariably controversial and hence, quite marketable. The front-page articles of major broad sheets usually quote civil society activists on all kinds of issues and political scandals. No evening television newscast seems complete without coverage of at least one civil society press conference.

Certainly there are civil society organizations with explicitly political mandates. Included here are NGOs involved in providing the research needs of political-ideological movements, those involved in the formation of political organizers or 'cadres', and civil society organizations which actively campaign for candidates in elections. The Philippine Party-List Law even encourages civil society representatives to seek public office by reserving twenty percent of the seats in the Lower House of Representatives for 'marginalized and underrepresented sectors'⁶.

It is interesting to note, however, that even NGOs and civic organizations oriented towards social development work (as opposed to politically-oriented groups) act in explicitly political ways in times of

perceived national crises. The diverse composition of Kompil II—from militant social movements to volunteer women's groups, professional organizations to religious movements—is instructive here (see Table 1 for the overview of its composition). This 'crossing of borders', as it were, by certain civil society organizations between the 'everyday' civic and development work vis-à-vis their political role in response to crisis situations is thus worth examining directly.

Civil Society and Political Action: Blurring Definitions and Delineations

Before delving into the case study of Kompil II, some clarifications are in order. To say that civil society is an amorphous entity is an understatement. A myriad of definitions and categorizations exist to make sense of this societal sphere, each highlighting different aspects of the concept in varying degrees. A review of the theories of civil society reveals them to be useful in categorizing various definitions of civil society.

One way is to distinguish between *residual* and *normative* definitions. An example of a residual definition is that of Gordon White (1994:379): 'an intermediate associational realm between state and family populated by organizations which are separate from

the state, enjoy autonomy in relations to the state and are formed voluntarily by members of society to protect or extend their interests or values.'

Larry Diamond (1994:6-7), on the other hand, asserts that civil society is 'not a mere residual category', synonymous with 'everything that is not the state or the formal political system'. Instead, he adds four dimensions to his description of civil society. First, civil society is concerned with *public* rather than private ends. Second, civil society *relates to the state* but does not aim to win formal power. Third, it encompasses *pluralism* and *diversity*. Fourth, it is marked by *partialness*, in that different groups represent different interests and no one group seeks to represent the whole of civil society.

To some extent, this resonates with definitions that rest on normative ascriptions. Ferrer (1997a: 12), for example, differentiates between 'inclusive' perspectives on civil society, which equate the latter with the 'non-profit sector'. On the other hand, the 'exclusive' view of civil society distinguishes between *non-transformative* associations, such as social clubs or sports teams, and an organized citizenry built on a culture of change and empowerment. The normative aspect of civil society is highlighted, based on the values of plurality, diversity, autonomy, tolerance, and community cooperation.

Diamond (1994:6) also calls our attention to this state-in-society perspective, to the fact that civil society is not only distinct from the state and the economy, but also from political society, meaning, in essence, the party system. Thus, 'organizations and networks within civil society may form alliances with political parties, but if they become captured by parties, or hegemonic within them, they thereby move their primary locus of activity to political society.' There is wide consensus that the benchmark in demarcating civil society organizations from political parties is that the former seek to *influence* those in power, while the latter seek to *gain positions of power* (Edwards and Hulme 1992: 17).

Another way of understanding the concept of civil society is to contrast *spatial* with *process-oriented* conceptions. Spatial language is commonly used to delineate civil society from the state and market as separate realms, spheres or spaces, which may overlap in varying degrees. Young (1999: 145), however, posits that we should think of these clusters of institutions as *kinds of activities* instead. Such a conception allows us to see that institutions where civil society activities dominate may also contain activities of the state and market and vice versa. This is also mirrored in Mohan and Stokke's (2000: 264) observation that there is growing emphasis on state-society *relations* rather than seeing state and society as separate spheres. According

'...there is a multiplicity of links between actors within the state and in society. These actors will have varying degrees of political autonomy and capacity to define and implement an agenda within a political arena. The relationship between state and society can be characterized by strategic engagement and disengagement, but the image of the state and society as discrete spheres cannot be sustained.'

White (1996: 183) describes this situation as follows:

'We should take to distinguish between civil society as an *ideal-type concept* which embodies the qualities of separation, autonomy and voluntary association in their pure form, and the *real world* of civil societies composed of associations which embody these principles to varying degrees. In this latter world, boundaries are often blurred...the two organizational spheres may overlap to varying degrees; ...individuals may play roles in both sectors.' [italics mine]

The succeeding section shows that this 'blurring' between political and civic roles is most applicable to the Philippine context.

Philippine Civil Society: The Inseparability of Democratization and Development

Given the complexities in the Philippine civil society terrain, it is often very difficult, if not self-defeating, to pin down where

civil society begins and ends. It is therefore not surprising when political scientist Joel Rocamora (2001) exclaims that in the Philippines, 'civil society does not exist except as a descriptive category'. What is being conveyed here is that the term civil society does not necessarily refer to an entity 'out there', but is more appropriately seen as a description of the wide *range* of engagements NGOs, POs and social movements are involved in.

In a similar vein, Carroll (1999:5) proposes that civil society in the Philippines is capable of two things. First, this addition to our vocabulary pulls together into a coherent whole what social activists have been doing over the years (before the term gained currency in the early 1990s). And second, it provides a conceptual meeting point or framework for activists coming from different traditions—from Catholic social thought to Marxism. The concept thus performs the function 'which good social theory has always performed, namely, that of synthesizing and legitimizing a particular line of action'.

Historical accounts of civil society help us to understand the relationship between civil society organizations and Philippine society as a whole. Racelis (2000) traces the development of civil society from Spanish times to the Estrada presidency, noting that civil society was significantly shaped by the 'dangerous,

heady experience of organizing oppressed people under martial law' (2000: 167). Indeed, one cannot understand Philippine civil society outside the anti-dictatorship struggle between the 1970s and 1980s. This struggle encompassed many groups, from Church and private entities to various political formations. Of the latter, the National Democratic Front (NDF) was the most dominant (Rocamora 1994).

Constantino-David (1997 & 1998) thus repeatedly includes what she calls 'ideological forces'⁷ in her overview of civil society. To the outsider, this may be startling, given some of the delineations made above. In the Philippines, though, these views have come about because key leaders of the left movement are also 'NGO personalities' in their own right. Constantino-David (1997: 43) thus notes that many development and advocacy NGOs 'were born out from the womb of ideological forces' and 'make no pretense at political neutrality'.

Several authors explore the relationship between development work and civil society's democratization thrust. As seen earlier, development work under the dictatorship had been seen as inextricably linked to political work (Rocamora 1994: 2-3). Because most development NGOs had been organized by or linked to political opposition groups, the empowerment of marginalized people had been seen as a stepping-stone to the 'seizure of

state power'. Thus, socio-economic undertakings and advocacy developed later than conscientization, community organizing and human rights work. When the monumental task of struggling against Marcos was gone, there was more time and space to develop expertise on development work and advanced skills in the policy and governance arena.

This trend towards increased institutionalization and professionalization is also described in Ferrer (1997b: 9) and Siliman and Noble (1998: 19). The latter point out that the 'social and political movements that constituted the core of civil society in the 1970s and 1980s are now largely replaced by relatively permanent social structures'.

But 'when and where do development NGOs indirectly promoting democracy become political?', asks Racelis (2000: 174). According to her, one would be 'hard-pressed to maintain this distinction meaningfully in the Philippines... where NGOs equate democracy with overcoming poverty and powerlessness...'. This is also mirrored in Siliman and Noble (1998: 307), in that 'much of the NGO agenda is indirectly political, aimed at changing socioeconomic conditions as to empower ordinary Filipinos... To the extent that NGOs succeed in changing the distribution of wealth and culture of middle- and lower-class Filipinos, they will ... solidify real democracy'.

The role of Philippine CSOs in transforming power relations is indicative of the channels and vehicles available in 'permeating, accessing and engaging' (Wui and Lopez 1997: 1) government in the democratization of power and resources. From a tradition of fierce opposition to the state under martial law, CSOs after 1986 continually face the task of refashioning themselves in a changing political terrain, going beyond democratic *transition* into democratic *consolidation*. From lobbying to implementing policy reform, from membership in consultative or technical government bodies, coordinating projects with state agencies, representation in local governance structures and participation in elections—there is a long list of formal and informal venues of interaction between civil society and the state (Wui and Lopez 1997: 6-7). Filipino activists are continually 'developing new ways of doing politics: new goals for political action, new organizations and strategies for achieving these goals, changes and shifts in the weight of power' (Noble 1997: 246).

In sum, the literature on civil society in the Philippines describes the inseparability of development work from an overarching framework towards popular empowerment and democratization. Some civil society organizations may be more explicitly political than others, but the high level of politicization is generally acknowledged.

Kompil II: Coming Together for a Common Cause

On 20 January 2001, President Joseph Ejercito Estrada's constitutional successor, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo was sworn in as chief executive of the Philippines by Supreme Court Chief Justice Hilario Davide. Within a few hours, Estrada and his immediate family vacated the presidential palace. Although there is wide consensus that the military's withdrawal of support was the determining factor in the ouster of Estrada, it was a concerted effort by civil society organizations, in collaboration with Church and business leaders, that provided the movement's impetus and muscle. Even though individual organizations were contemplating the removal as early as 1999, the consolidated anti-Estrada movement only took shape a mere three months before his fall.

Kompil II can be credited for bringing together various civil society actors under a common denominator: the removal of a corrupt and ineffectual president⁹. Kompil II gave organizational expression to the growing disenchantment that was felt among mostly middle and upper class urban households¹⁰. Kompil's Resign, Impeach, Oust (RIO) framework was a product of the 29 October 2000 founding Congress. In its first public statement, the coalition called on Estrada 'to do the decent thing and *resign* to save our

country from further ruin'. It called on 'Congress to *impeach* Joseph Estrada, to open their eyes and hearts to the evidence and do their duty regardless of party loyalties and promises of pork'. And finally, it called on 'the people to *oust* Erap, by persisting in peaceful and democratic actions, and by withdrawing support from an incorrigible slacker who has gambled away their mandate for principles and responsible leadership'.

These calls rested on Kompil's analysis that the country was gripped by three *es*: a crisis of *leadership* characterized by 'midnight policies that have favored crony interests and machismo that has plunged Mindanao into war', a crisis of *survival* in that cronyism and corruption have disabled the economy, and a crisis of *morality* marked by the President's indulgence in gambling, excessive drinking and womanizing.

For two months, throughout November and December 2001, Kompil II members participated in mass actions and protest rallies throughout the Metropolis. At its height, Kompil II comprised more than 250 organizations in Metro Manila and surrounding areas. With no official membership requirements and informal leadership structures, all meetings were open to any interested party. Organizations freely moved in and out of council committee meetings, general assemblies and rallies.

Table 1: Overview of Kompil II composition

SECTOR	MAIN ORGANIZATIONS
Ideological Formations	Sanlakas, Socialistang Partido ng Panggawa (SPP), Social Democratic Caucus (SDC), Pandayan, Padayon, Bisig
Party-List Organizations	Akbayan, Ako, Coop-Natoco, Abanse Ptnay
Church/ Religious groups	Gomburza, National Secretariat for Social Action, Justice and Peace (NASSA), Couples for Christ (CFC), Magis Deo, Islamic Welfare Society, Victims of Mindanao War
Business groups	Makati Business Club (MBC), Katapat, Isang Tugon
Civic groups	Konsensyang Pilipino (KP), pinoy-rin.net
Networks & Coalitions	CODE NGO, National Peace Conference (NPC), Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC)
NGOs	National Institute for Policy Studies (NIPS), CO-Multiversity, Center for Alternative Development Initiatives (CADi)
Urban Poor	Urban Land Reform Taskforce (ULRT), Kristong Hari Foundation
Peasant	Pambansang Kilusan Ng Samahang Magsasaka (PAKISAMA), AR Now!, PKSK, Kilos-Saka
Labor	Alliance of Progressive Labor (APL), Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP), Federation of Free Workers (FFW)
Women	Aware, Concerned Women of the Philippines (CWP), Women Action Network for Development (WAND), PILIPINA, Mother Earth
Youth	Movement for the Advancement of Student Power (MASP), Student Council Alliance of the Philippines (SCAP), Youth for Christ

The coalition brought together contending camps of the Philippine left, rival party-list organizations, allied NGOs, labor and peasant groups and urban poor formations (see Table 1). Together, these political groups united with less politically inclined civic and religious organizations, and even employers' federation representatives from Makati. The organizational feat of Kompil II, so to speak, was that it was able to galvanize diverse forces around a common goal,

without alienating less politically inclined actors.

The broadness of the Kompil II coalition may well be reflective of the class character of People Power II. Although almost half of People Power II participants were from the middle class¹¹, Reyes (2001) asserts that People Power II had a distinct grassroots imprint. He observes that although 'the central issues of the struggle—corruption and

bad governance—had been traditionally identified with the elite and conservative forces of society, the Left as well as other grassroots social movements also took up these issues but linked them more clearly to the social struggles against poverty and dis-empowerment of the majority’.

Kompil II as a Political Actor

Kompil II acted politically in various ways. For the purposes of this paper, I would like to distinguish ‘politically active’ from ‘partisan’ activity. The latter revolves around building political parties and elections. ‘Acting politically’, broadly defined, can be seen as changing power relations by going beyond the institutional sphere of the formal political system. For Kompil II, this was accomplished by flexing one’s political muscle in terms of numbers (mass actions), articulation of demands

(agenda-building) and clout (negotiating with allied forces).

Mobilizations and Mass Actions

From 9 November 2000 to 8 January 2001, Kompil II co-organized and participated in at least eight mass actions, as indicated in *Table 2*. The estimates (ranging from 3,000 – 1,000,000) indicate the total estimated headcount of protesters on a given day, since it is not possible to ascertain the exact number of Kompil II members among the protesters. Kompil II not only mobilized its own member networks to participate in mass actions, but also provided a venue for the so-called ‘walk-ins’, individuals without organizational affiliations, to join in. Carroll (2001:249) notes that ‘lay civil society became less dependent on the Church as time went on’. While the prayer rally on November 4 was entirely managed by the Catholic Church,

Table 2: Anti-Estrada Mobilizations with Kompil II Participation in Metro Manila

DATE	TITLE / VENUE	LEAD ORGANIZATIONS	ESTIMATED NO. OF PARTICIPANTS
4 Nov. 2000	Prayer rally at EDSA Shrine	Archdiocese of Manila	130,000
14 Nov. 2000	Welgang Bayan [General Strike]	Sanlakas, Bagong Alyansa Makabayan (BAYAN)	260,000
26 Nov. 2000	Prayer cum resignation rally at Luneta Park	Jesus is Lord	minimal Kompil II participation
28 Nov. 2000	"Impeachain" at Quezon City	Kompil II	3,000
29 Nov. 2000	"Satu-Satu sa Ayala" [picnic of at Ayala Avenue], Makati City	Council for Philippine Affairs (COPA) & Bagong Alyansa Makabayan (BAYAN)	Not available
30 Nov. 2000	Liwasan Bonifacio & Mendiola, Manila	Labor Solidarity Movement (LSM)	Not available
7 Dec. 2000	Jericho March at Senate	Kompil II in coordination with Catholic Church (Cardinal Sin)	25,000 - 70,000

the Jericho March on 7 December and the actual People Power II events were in the hands of lay groups within Kompil II.

Agenda-building

Perhaps less known to the general public, Kompil II leaders also started dialoguing with then Vice-President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, parallel to its public campaign. The minutes of the Kompil Steering Committee reveal that the coalition presented its civil society agenda for a post-Estrada scenario to Arroyo as early as 28 November 2000. The Kompil II presentation was divided into two main parts: (1) the macro/cross-sectional agenda, and (2) the sectoral/social reform agenda. The former included proposals on economic reforms (asset reform, poverty reduction, monetary policy on interest rates, revenue collection, debt servicing and deregulation of oil industry), anti-corruption measures, the peace process and the environment. The sectoral agenda focused on labor, peasant, women and urban poor concerns.

Engaging Vice President Arroyo on her platform was part of Kompil's concerns from the very beginning. At the second council meeting on 9 November 2000, there was an extensive discussion on Kompil's framework vis-à-vis Arroyo. The minutes of the meeting reflect that 'while some view her as a traditional politician, the need for substance on her positions,

however, can be viewed as a starting point for discussion.' Kompil II was well aware that Arroyo, at that point in time, was scrambling to publicly project her capacity to govern on the basis of platforms and programs—in contrast to Estrada. Kompil II would urge her to 'recognize the importance of civil society in governance'. It was agreed, however, that Kompil II 'should maintain independence and autonomy from GMA'. Far from being politically naïve, members were well aware of the multiple balancing acts this engagement would entail. On the one hand, influencing the policy framework of the new administration was a good opportunity to bring in civil society's long-standing advocacies. On the other hand, Kompil II was not thrilled by the idea that if Arroyo succeeded Estrada, her party-mates in Lakas-NUCD would gain prominence. Moreover, the minutes of a 9 November 2000 council meeting reveal the group's consciousness of the fact that in Philippine politics, 'there is a tendency to use the organized basic sectors for partisan political interests'.

Alliance-Building and Negotiations

The decision of Kompil II to engage the incoming President on her agenda intrinsically made the civil society formation a political player. Since Kompil II was confident of its claim to representation (as demonstrated by the number of warmbodies it was repeatedly able to mobilize in its

protest actions) and its legitimacy (for being able to dialogue with the Vice President on a one-on-one basis), the coalition was able to assert itself as major player within the larger opposition movement.

Kompil II had important links to key institutions. With the National Secretariat for Social Action, Justice and Peace (NASSA) among its ranks, Kompil II came into the larger movement with the Catholic Church 'on its side'. Kompil II was also the conduit to the increasingly influential religious movement, Couples for Christ. Among non-state actors, it also provided a 'moderate' pole to leftist formations.

Politicians were well aware of Kompil's niche and eagerly sought to share the limelight with the coalition in anticipation of the 'changing guards' should Estrada indeed be removed from office. Yet Kompil continuously sought to publicly distance itself from being identified with politicians. During the fateful days of People Power II, the coalition came up with an explicit 'defectors'¹¹ policy. This meant that 'last minute' resignations would be announced publicly to the sea of people gathered at the EDSA shrine, but the individual politicians themselves would not be allowed to speak on stage. Their actions would be welcomed, but they would not be proclaimed 'heroes'.

Informal sub-groups of Kompil II were invited to 'cluster meetings' with members

of the United Opposition Movement (UMO) composed of political parties Reporma, Lakas-NUCD, Promdi and the Philippine Democratic Socialist Party (PDSP). The larger movement also included retired generals Lisandro Abadia and Renato de Villa, as well as former Senator Alberto Romulo and José 'Peping' Cojuangco. And so, for a time, Kompil II shared the headlines with all these major players in Philippine politics.

Gradations and Limits of Acting Politically

From publicly calling for the resignation of President Estrada, joining protest activities, initiating policy debates, forging alliances with political forces and building national coalitions for concerted extra-constitutional action: even the less politically-minded CSOs interviewed had no qualms about becoming politically active in times of a national crisis. However, my research indicates that the unity among CSOs studied was sutured along two critical lines: (1) civil society leaders accepting government positions and, (2) endorsing candidates for government posts, whether in elections to the legislature or for positions in the executive branch.

As the People Power euphoria settled and it was time to 'get down to business', the new President did not

let Kompil's contribution go unnoticed. In fact, Arroyo made one of Kompil's spokespersons, Victoria Garchitorena, part of her search team for candidates for appointed government posts. Later, Arroyo appointed her as head of the Presidential Management Staff (PMS). Two of the most prominent Kompil II leaders who accepted Cabinet positions were, of course, Corazon 'Dinky' Soliman (Department of Social Welfare and Development) and Teresita 'Ging' Deles (National Anti-Poverty Commission).

Yet this kind of 'career shift' did not sit well with a number of Kompil II members, who did not feel comfortable about civil society members joining government. A key informant who wished not to be identified related that 'after [People Power II], the level of attendance at Kompil meetings doubled or tripled. The bottom line was that everyone thought of Kompil as access to Malacañang [the Philippine presidential palace]. Some got positions, projects. There was wheeling and dealing left and right'. This certainly indicate an aversion towards perceived opportunism, as if the motivation for joining a large civil society formation was to benefit from political spoils, rather than the commitment to common goals. Another informant observed: 'Some groups joined to further own interests and agitate. Some interest groups have people everywhere—judiciary, executive, NGOs, etc., to further their personal interests, not public ones.

They hired people to campaign for them. But I would say the heart and soul of Kompil is really social reform. That is why a lot people joined'.

While divergent outlooks on political engagement did not pose a problem *during* the anti-Estrada campaigning, the fault line was felt *after* the common objective was achieved. Eventually, this created a chasm between those whose commitment remains on civil society collective action and those for whom civil society has become a springboard for accessing government position and resources.

The elections in May 2001 proved to be another test of how far Kompil II was prepared to become politically involved. A few Kompil II leaders were involved in consultations with Arroyo on the composition of the senatorial ticket she would endorse. Eventually, Kompil II was divided into several camps: (1) those who maintained that Kompil II should not become involved in elections, (2) those who wanted to campaign for the full senatorial slate of Arroyo, and (3) those who were willing to campaign for a select line-up of senatorial candidates, based on mutually agreed upon criteria. The majority of groups at the coordinating council drifted towards the latter direction, although the Kompil II campaign never took off as expected.

As election fever began to heat up, those who wanted to campaign for Arroyo's choice

of candidates formed their own campaign organization, separate from Kompil II¹². How was this electoral engagement justified? The director of Couples for Christ (CfC), one of the lead organizations in this endeavor, wrote in March 2001:

'So now we are into politics. Is that good? Is that proper for a spiritual community such as CfC? Of the answer is an unequivocal yes! Our theme for the millennium is bringing glad tidings to the poor.... This means we are concerned about both the spiritual and social dimensions of the gospel (if there is such a division).... But should we be into *partisan* politics? Again, yes, if the needs of the times dictate it. Politics has become a dirty word, and partisan politics has come to have an even dirtier meaning. As it is, politics simply refers to the life of a people, centered on governance. It is how politics is carried out that makes it dirty.' (Ugnayan 2001:2)

Endorsing aspirants for executive positions in government was another contentious issue. Farmers' groups interviewed insisted 'we endorsed Leony Montemayor to become Secretary of Agriculture, but that does not mean we cannot criticize him on policies'¹³.

The coalition slowly but surely dissociated after the elections. Meetings became fewer and less frequent, as member-organizations either went back to their social development 'business'. And those who made Kompil II a springboard for political ambitions busied themselves with their new jobs.

Where to draw the line between the 'civil' and 'political' is likely to be a source of continued tension and debate among civil society organizations, long after the Kompil II experience. A few tentative propositions may be drawn up at this point.

Among the organizations studied, membership-based organizations run strictly by volunteers are explicitly against endorsing candidates and campaigning in elections—perhaps because people in these kinds of civil society organizations have made a conscious commitment to civic-oriented concerns over joining partisan formations. They are highly suspicious of politics to begin with.

By contrast, church-based organizations such as CfC and NASSA are more enthusiastic about making public statements on political aspirants and power holders. Their mission to evangelize and to imbue public debate with questions of morality may be a variable at play here.

Other Kompil II members interviewed seem to set the parameters of their action more liberally in endorsing and campaigning for candidates. This is true for NGO or PO umbrella organizations, like Code-NGO or the National Peace Conference (NPC), which are headed by activists-turned NGO professionals. The latter might not always agree with particular positions taken by former colleagues who

became government officials. Yet they seem to acknowledge that these kinds of 'career shifts' are a part of the 'real world'. In principle, there is consensus that civil society advocacy is essentially about pushing for the common good, untainted by political games. In practice, however, key informants from an activist-NGO background believe that pressure politics from below can become more effective by working with and placing allies *within* government structures.

Conclusion

My research serves a snapshot of a small sample of contemporary civil society organizations. It illustrates that civil society is best understood as a *kind of activity*, rather than a homogeneous entity 'out there'. The divergent outlook among coalition members on strategic questions such as participation in partisan election activity and accepting government posts indicates that what constitutes 'civil society' remains highly contested in the Philippine setting.

Defining what this kind of activity is all about is an ongoing process. Philippine civil society organizations continue to gain new experiences in all kinds of advocacy endeavors. In so doing, these organizations' latitude in defining their scope of engagements is continually shifting as well, depending on the specific context and issue of concern.

Beckman (2001: 51) proposes a useful way of thinking of civil society as a *platform for launching projects*, which is applicable to the Kompil II experience:

'Given these observations about the way CSOs in the Philippines conduct themselves, it may be useful to view this realm of society as a platform for launching certain projects. ... 'civil society' may serve as a common platform for interacting with other groups both in order to protect their own rights to operate and to advance rights issues, including democratization, and society in general.'

As the anti-Estrada campaign gained momentum, political and non-political civil society organizations came together under the banner of Kompil II and in so doing, found it effective to identify themselves as 'civil society' to distance themselves from interest groups wanting to gain political power. The 'civil society' label endowed them with moral ascendancy, which facilitated networking and mobilizing people.

The line between the 'political' and 'civil' is, indeed, blurred by the Kompil II experience, which was a direct response to a particular political conjuncture that called for drastic collective action. Writing in the post-People Power II context, Carroll (2002: 6) observes: '...civil society has played and is playing a crucial political role. At best, it brings values into a situation that tends to be dominated by power alone, and it articulates the concerns of groups otherwise unrepresented in the political process'.

Civil society organizations that participated in Kompil II took it upon themselves to fight for the removal of Estrada both because of the apparent gravity of abuse of power and because their 'everyday' advocacies would not prosper under an administration bereft of the principles of good governance and concern for the public good. In a situation where the processes in politics and governance were riddled with grave corruption and patronage, it became an imperative for these civil society organizations to create more favorable conditions at the macro-political level, so that they could get back to their mandated 'civil society' advocacies.

The advances civil society organizations have made in becoming players in the country's political processes are of course laudable. Yet advocates are faced with a tough balancing act: learning the ropes of being astute lobbyists and negotiators, while staying true to their constituents. Issues of representation and accountability have never been more relevant. As Carroll (2002:6) warns:

'...no matter how much they [civil society organizations] choose to engage government as watchdogs and participants, they must never allow themselves to be co-opted and lose their contact with the basic sectors¹⁴. And above all, they must be guided by values. Failing in these areas, they *risk becoming simply new interest groups fighting for a larger slice of the pie.*' [italics mine]

Sadly, this fight for the pie of development resources is an inescapable reality. Philippine civil society organizations have been recipients of vast foreign development aid, both private and official country assistance, which contributed to the mushrooming of NGOs and POs after 1986. This source of assistance is slowly drying out, as donors are looking to 'newer' countries-in-transition¹⁵ to support elsewhere in the region. Civil society organizations are keenly aware of the fact that accessing state resources is going to be the most viable way to ensure their sustainability.

This may also explain the open-mindedness of certain NGOs in working with the state. Writes Kawanaka (2002: 120):

'NGOs are enthusiastic about participating in policy-making and electoral politics because they know that the state controls the overwhelming portion of the country's resources and monopolizes the power of regulation. In a late-starting industrial country like the Philippines, NGOs can only expect to get their ideal programmes implemented by using the resources of the state... [The political system] contains, so to speak, a window through which NGOs can get effective access to state resources, bypassing bureaucratic hurdles. NGOs are thus motivated to take part in electoral campaigns, get their officers appointed to public posts, win elected or appointed officials over to their side and otherwise engage in politics. They believe that this is the way to gain access to state resources.'

At a macro level, the political system may also be blamed, in that it has no incentives for ensuring bottom-up processes for accountability:

'Another factor explaining the deep involvement of NGOs in the government is the American-style political institution that has been adopted in the Philippines. It ensures political power holders (elected officials) a position of superiority over administration mechanisms (bureaucracy). Under this public service system, the President has broad powers of appointment, and as a result a large-scale turnover of public servants occurs every time a new President is sworn in. Many officials are political appointees... Under it, it is a common and accepted practice for private sector persons to be appointed as high officials or presidential aides. NGO people are no exception. Also, since elected officials and their appointees are granted large powers, they can freely exercise their influence without obstruction from the bureaucracy.' (Kawanaka 2002:119)

The blurring between the 'civil' and 'political' roles of civil society organizations may also be explained by the weak party system found in the Philippines. States Magadia (2003: 14):

'One of the ironies of the Philippine experience is that the intrinsic weakness of its political party system has opened the state to the new politics of interaction. In the absence of strong mass-based, ideologically distinct political parties with clear programmatic platforms... societal organizations have been able to fill a political gap. They have been accepted by traditional elite power holders and technocrats as autonomous partners in some the processes involved in governance.'

We may speculate that if there had been a consolidated opposition party (or coalition) taking on the Kompil II platform during the impeachment debacle, civil society organizations could have played a less political role. Indeed, Kompil II members interviewed were very suspicious of opposition politicians who were perceived as acting out of their own personal interests, not out of concern for the public good.

By default, it seems civil society organizations fulfill a vital function otherwise played by political parties: the articulation of citizens' interests or as White (1996: 186) puts it, 'facilitating political communication between state and society'. As long as vested elite interests dominate the formal political system, more vibrant and transformative political activity is possible *outside* the institutional shell of formal politics, in civil society gatherings and in the 'parliament of the streets'. It is in this context that the political engagements of Philippine CSOs must be appreciated. As the Philippine nation limps from one political crisis to the next, civil society's role as the 'voice' of the concerned citizenry is likely to be amplified even more.

Endnotes

This article is based on the author's Master of Arts thesis entitled 'Civil Society's Engagements and Dis-

Engagements: The Case of Kompil II' for her degree in Sociology at the Ateneo de Manila University (2004). An earlier version of this article was presented at the Third National Philippine Studies Conference on 6 December 2004.

¹The 1987 Constitution is also often referred to as 'People Power' Constitution in reference to its exemplary Bill of Rights. The declaration of principles and state policies (Article II, Section 23) provides that the state should 'encourage nongovernmental, community-based, or sectoral organizations that promote the welfare of the nation'.

²The Local Government Code (Republic Act 7160 of 1991) mandates mechanisms for direct citizen participation in local governance through local sectoral representation, initiative and referendum, and partnerships between local governments and non-governmental groupings (see Iszatt 2004 for a comprehensive discussion of these mechanisms).

³The Urban Development and Housing Act (Republic Act 7279 of 1992), for example, is a celebrated case of a successful civil society and church lobby in solidarity with informal settlers. The law contains the vision of 'equitable utilization of residential land ... with particular attention to the needs and requirements of the underprivileged and homeless citizens and not merely on the basis of market forces.'

⁴Most notable here is the creation of the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC), a central coordinating body institutionalizing the participation of basic sectors in the government's anti-poverty programs (Magadia 2003: 164).

⁵Data gathering for this research was accomplished from July to December 2002.

⁶See Republic Act 7491 of 1995, otherwise known as the Party-List Act, for the system's institutional design.

⁷Constantino-David describes these as those 'articulating alternative ideological paradigms and [organizational] responses to issues like national democracy, popular democracy, social democracy, etc.'

⁸Aside from Estrada's decadent lifestyle, issues that piqued public ire were his agreement to bury the former dictator Ferdinand Marcos at the *Libingan ng mga Bayani* [Heroes' Cemetery], his affront to press freedom that caused the closure of the *Manila Times*, and an insider-trading scandal in the Philippine Stock Exchange involving his cronies.

⁹ From October to December 2000, Pulse Asia nationwide surveys reveal that net trust ratings in Estrada hovered at 30 percent for the AB classes and 20 percent for C class. By contrast the D class rating went from 32 percent in October to 35

percent in December, while for the E class the rating remained consistent at 31 percent for the same time period.

¹⁰A Pulse Asia survey taken between February 3 to 5, 2001, among Metro Manila respondents indicates the following class distribution in People Power II rallies: 18 percent from the AB classes, 47 percent from the C class, 22 percent from the D class, 9 percent from the D class with middle class jobs (who share 'middle class values') and 4 percent from the E class. Bautista (2001: 8-9) surmises that the rallyists from the D and E classes might have been conscientized by organizations they belong to (trade unions, religious movements like Couples for Christ, etc.).

¹¹Prominent 'defectors' included former tourism Secretary Gemma Araneta-Cruz and former Cavite Governor Ramon Revilla.

¹²This new electoral formation was dubbed the '13:0 Movement' to signify

the protest vote against candidates associated with former President Estrada in favor of the 13 candidates of the Arroyo administration. It must be noted that in the Philippines, senators are directly elected, not by proportional representation through political parties.

¹³The President of the Philippines has a free hand in appointing cabinet positions. Secretaries must *not* be members of the ruling party or coalition.

¹⁴A few months after People Power II, on 1 May 2001, urban poor rioters stormed towards the presidential palace, demanding the re-installment of Estrada and blaming the rich for the overthrow of their 'idol'. CSOs, together with the rest of the country, were dumbfounded at the ugly class divide between pro and anti-Estrada forces and the depth of alienation experienced by the rioters.

¹⁵ Relevant examples of such countries in transition are Cambodia and Indonesia.

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Prospective contributors are requested to observe the following guidelines:

1. Standard length of papers is 6000 words (approximately 20 pages typed double spaced with generous margins at the top, bottom, and sides of the page), but shorter contributions are also welcome.
2. Include a brief abstract of 100-200 words summarizing the findings and at most five key words on a separate sheet of paper (without author information).
3. Title, author's name, affiliation(s), full address (including telephone and email address) and a brief biographical note should be typed on a separate sheet.
4. Notes should contain more than a mere reference, although it is recommended to use notes only for substantive observation and to limit the length. They must be numbered serially and presented at the end of the article in a separate endnotes section that appears before the References.
5. All illustrations, diagrams, and tables to be referred to as "Figures" and "Tables" and numbered according to the sequence in the text. Figures should be referred to by number (Figure 1) rather than by placement (See Figure below). Each table and figure must include a descriptive title.
6. Please use the American Psychological Association (APA) citation style.

- a) The following examples illustrate the format for referencing in the text:

(Banzon-Bautista, 1998, p. 21)

(Lynch & Makil, 1968)

Zialcita (2005)

For Filipinos, the “outside” world is “a place of power, wealth, cleanliness, beauty, glamour and enjoyment” (Cannell, 1995, p. 223).

Source: Saloma, 2001

“After all,” he said, “*pinoy* can be seen along national lines.”

Source: Saloma, 2001

- b) List two or more works by different authors who are cited within the same parentheses in alphabetical order by the first author’s surname. Separate the citations with semicolons.

For example:

Scholars (Karaos, 1997; Porio, 1997; Tapales, 1996)

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Newspaper Article

Estopace, D. (2005, January 25). The business of poverty Today, p. B3

Article from the Internet

Mershon, D. H. (1998, November-December). Star Trek on the brain: Alien minds, human minds. *American Scientist*, 86, 585. Retrieved July 29, 1999, from Expanded Academic ASAP database.

Cabrera, R. E. (2003). Renewable energy program for Mindanao.
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Book

Berner, E. (1997). *Defending a place in the city*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.

Book Article or Chapter

Racelis, M. (1988). Becoming an urbanite: The neighborhood as a learning environment." In J. Gugler (Ed), *The urbanization of the third world* (pp. 219-224). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Conference paper

Sassen, S. (1994). Identity in the Global City: Economic and Cultural Encasements. Paper presented at the conference on The Geography of Identity. University of Michigan, 4-5 February.