

# Peace Negotiations as a Subjective Conversation between Groups

Cristina J. Montiel\*

I. INTRODUCTION.....	287
II. LAYERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE PEACE PROCESS.....	287
III. THE POLITICAL CONVERSATION.....	289
IV. MAJORITY GROUPS V. MINORITY GROUPS.....	289
V. THE NEXT STEP.....	290

## I. INTRODUCTION

Thank you, Bong Montesa. You provided a very good introduction to what we are going to be talking about, because even within the state, there are different story lines going on. The peace negotiations are a subjective conversation between groups.

Some thoughts on the nature of the political conversation about the peace in Mindanao. First, we have to know who are talking, and these are persons, organizations, state, and global actors. Then we have to know what is being said, not really the words that are being said, but what are the meanings attached to the words, as the meanings attached to these words come from a whole different culture. Finally, we have to talk about what is to be done, how we are to navigate the political conversation about peace in Mindanao.

So who are conversing about peace in Mindanao? These are like embedded layers, they go from small to big, and they all happen at one single point in time, or at any point in time during the negotiation, just like the illustration found in Annex A.

## II. LAYERS OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE PEACE PROCESS

Inside we have people, we have individual peace advocates, many of them are in this room right now. They come with their own personal history, their own biases, their own personal needs and aspirations, or traumas maybe

---

\* '84 Ph.D., Ateneo de Manila University. Dr. Cristina J. Montiel has been with the Psychology Department of Ateneo de Manila University for 30 years. An internationally recognized peace and political psychologist, Dr. Montiel serves as editorial board member of the Peace Psychology Book Series by Springer Publications. Her recent publications include *Political Psychology of Nonviolent Democratic Transitions in Southeast Asia* (2006) and *Peace Psychology in Asia* (2009).

about conflict, and they are crucial because they are shapers who influence the outcome of the conversation. But they are not the only ones participating. Aside from people, we have groups — civil society peace movements, NGOs, church groups, and local government units. The latter one is now part of the conversation, as seen from the whole Memorandum of Agreement on the Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD)<sup>1</sup> fiasco.

These groups have a collective mind and a collective heart, because if the grievance is collective, the history is collective, then also the heart and mind are collective. This is not the same as the people who speak in the name of the group. People who speak in the name of the group, they are not exactly the same, so one must try getting the stories of the group rather than assume that one person can tell the stories of the group. The State, as Atty. Montesa pointed out, is an active participant in the peace conversation but even within the State, there are conversations going on there, between lots of people sometimes. And finally, there are the global partners. For example, Malaysia hosted talks with the MILF in Kuala Lumpur, also Indonesia with the MNLF in Jakarta. Also, I think European and U.S. agencies fund peace projects in Mindanao. So we have global collaborators who come in again with their own different state relationships with our country, the Philippines, and with the non-state actors involved.

Each layer affects the other at a single point in time. Let us say, what are people saying about peace in North Cotabato? What do they want? If you get a survey from five years ago, certainly that survey will not be accurate today, because everyday the conversation changes. So one needs to know at what point in time you are listening to what people are saying. These layers may also affect each other, and the State, luckily for us, is willing to negotiate with non-state actors, the MILF and the MNLF.

Even within the life of a single person, the peace conversation changes, if that person is a key person in the peace process. So one will have to know what is going on in the lives of the different players. Even the state changes. For example, we will have our election next year. Is there going to be a power shift in our state that is going to change the contour of the peace conversation in Mindanao?

I just want to make a note, the El Salvador experience of the peace talks happened at a different stage of their state development. We are now at a different stage — at that time maybe local government officials were not strategic because they were just coming out of a revolution. Now the local government officials are very strategic because we are now stabilizing after the toppling of the Marcos dictatorship. We are past our transition. Now, 20 years later, we are at a very different stage in our state life. We are already in

---

1. Memorandum of Agreement on the Ancestral Domain Aspect of the GRP-MILF Tripoli Agreement on Peace of 2001, Aug. 5, 2008.

the stage of state building, so we need to build our state institutions, like the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) and local government institutions and other institutions that are there.

### III. THE POLITICAL CONVERSATION

What is being said in a peace conversation? In a political conversation about peace among unequal groups, the meaning of peace is different between the two maybe because of the inequality.

We will show you what happens in one study. Fr. Charlie Inzon, OMI, one of the doctoral students who did this study here in Ateneo, is from Mindanao, and he did his dissertation on the meanings of peace. He did not do it in the conventional, survey type of way; he just asked for stories. So he got key leaders from the armed groups, and he just asked them to tell him the story of the Mindanao conflict. He did some data analysis of the narratives and the finding was that the conflict was about land, about the armed struggle, and about the fact that in the past, there was peace. So that was the basic story line, but if you nuance the story, it is really the same story but different sub-stories. If you listen to the Visayans, the Christians, their reading of land is a legitimate title claim, and it is land protection. It is possession of the title. If you listen to the Lumads, ownership of lands means you have territorial claim, that it is a bounded area where your ancestors lived from long ago. If you listen to the Moros, legitimate claim to the land is based on ancestral claim, similar but not identical to territorial claim. Territorial claim means you claim a smaller area of land which is very meaningful to your particular group. But ancestral claim is more political, and it refers to a bigger area in Mindanao.

The meaning of the armed struggle is, for the Visayans, the story of power hungry and violent Moros; for the Lumads, it is the story of the Visayan and Moro aggression; and for the Moros, armed struggle is a natural thing, part of a cause for their ancestral claims.

For the meaning of a peaceful past, the meaning of peace is very different among the groups. For Christians, peace is interpersonal, or getting along with others. For the Lumads, it is being able to live in their sacred place, or territorial peace. For the Moros, it has something to do with structural peace or the ancestral domain and the Bangsamoro story. So there are really different meanings of peace in their stories.

### IV. MAJORITY GROUPS V. MINORITY GROUPS

Somebody earlier talked about majority groups and minority groups. This is how past researches have shown that the meanings of peace between majority groups and minority groups are different, and in a conversation, if you want to talk between two people, then you look at the two meanings.

Among the majority group — and this is not only in the Philippines, but in general — the dominant group speaks of peace more directly: stop the killing, and you get along with others. Peace would mean no killings, no clashes with government groups, no kidnappings, and also getting healed, or going through post-violence trauma therapy. Peace is usually in the language of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration, or DDR.

For the non-dominant or the minority groups, their version of peace speaks of an entirely different story, an entirely different cultural, historical, emotional narrative. It revolves around social fairness and it is about perceived fair sharing of political and economic access to resources. Peace is in the language of ancestral domain.

#### V. THE NEXT STEP

What is to be done? How do we navigate a political conversation about peace? Everyday, the conversation changes. It is important to have the ability to read and navigate through everyday changes going on in all the layers at any single point in time. What is important is one's sense of timing. A while ago, somebody talked about ripeness for change. In terms of timing, is it ripe to suggest constitutional change now? Look at your sense of timing. Somebody may want her term extended beyond 2010. So this might not be the right time. Maybe, I do not know. But what you have to read is what is going on in all the layers at that particular point in time. If it is the right mix, the right factors are present, then you can do it now.

When people talk and negotiate about what is meaningful to each group, to avoid a political monologue, one would not only have to look at who are talking to the other but also what is being talked about. Are there only issues of direct peace, or of respecting each other or liking each other, hating each other, or are there issues on social fairness, on who owns the land in Mindanao? Can that be talked about not only on the faith level but also on the collective level? Could faith communities of Christians and Muslims hold interfaith discussions on what is going on?

We can talk about what we feel and think about land ownership in Mindanao. Note that in the beginning, the MOA-AD talks may have seemed okay on the national-state level. But now we know that there is another dynamic to that, as we saw in the resistance from the local governments and community levels, the rallies, and all the things that happened in the Iligan vicinity. Can future dialogue take place about both the topics of direct peace and social fairness, even on the community level? A final note in favor of intra-faith dialogue. For example, dialogue among Christians — just by putting issues of Mindanao land ownership on the agenda of Christian intra-faith dialogues could be a conversation changer.

## ANNEX A – DIAGRAM “WHO ARE CONVERSING ABOUT PEACE IN MINDANAO?”

## Who are conversing about peace in Mindanao?



Each layer affects the other, and changes everyday.