

BOOK REVIEWS

MIRIAM CORONEL FERRER

Costly Wars, Elusive Peace

Collected Articles on the Peace Processes
in the Philippines, 1990–2007

Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 2013. 359 pp.

Costly Wars, Elusive Peace was published in the same month a two-week stand-off in Zamboanga City occurred between the Philippine military and rogue Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) forces. Only a few months previously, an armed group claiming to represent the current Sultan of Sulu tried to reclaim Sabah (now part of Malaysia) in the name of the sultanate, raising fears that this would affect the peace agreement forged between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) which Malaysia helped facilitate. These incidents again put the harsh spotlight on the Philippine government's efforts at forging peace—not only with the Moro nationalist groups, but with armed insurgencies in general—and the role of foreign intervention in peace negotiations.

In light of these events, this book (which collects Miriam Coronel Ferrer's 17 years of work in peace-building in the Philippines) could not have been timelier. Subtitled *Collected Articles on the Peace Processes in the Philippines, 1990–2007*, it presents one of the most comprehensive pictures available of the Philippine peace processes set against the backdrop of the broader political movements that set the stage for armed insurgencies, particularly the communist insurgency and the Bangsamoro resistance. Divided into four parts, the bulk of the volume collects papers written and presented by Coronel Ferrer

on various peace efforts in the Philippines, with a notable emphasis on the peace processes in Mindanao, the Philippines' southernmost island. This emphasis on Mindanao seems particularly fitting as the region has experienced the effects of both communist insurgency and the Islamic/Moro separatism.

The first part, an overview of the history of armed conflict in the Philippines, is a concise starting point for researchers unfamiliar with the Philippine context and its history of peace building in the face of armed insurgency. The three articles in this section highlight the costs of war and the circumstances that contribute to the persistence of armed insurgency in the Philippines, the latter two focusing on the history of the communist insurgency and the Moro resistance. Coronel Ferrer uses Mindanao to illustrate the benefits and costs of war and peace, highlighting the relationship between lack of development, insurgency, and peace efforts. She treads familiar ground, however, for more advanced researchers.

The second (and briefest) part of *Costly Wars, Elusive Peace* touches on the peace processes between the Philippine government and the long-standing communist insurgency led by the Communist Party of the Philippines-National Democratic Front (CPP-NDF). The second essay in this section would be of most interest for scholars of peace studies, interrogating the concept of "mediation" and its underlying assumptions of neutrality and impartiality, and teasing out the various mediators (formal and informal) involved in negotiations from 1986 to 1993. Offering an "alternative definition and typology" of mediation, Coronel Ferrer challenges the traditional assumption of how a mediator ought to be a neutral outsider to the parties in conflict, a line of questioning that could be further explored in light of more recent experiences in peace negotiations between the GRP (Government of the Republic of the Philippines) and MILF.

It is the last two parts of the book that would be of most interest to peace studies scholars, political scientists, policy-makers, and workers in non-government organizations alike. Part 3 offers incisive analyses of the role of autonomous rule in the peace process, discussing the successes and failures of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and other attempts at autonomy and the relative merits various proposals for federalism. Part 4 examines the various elements of peace building, from the role of government, civil society, and foreign negotiators, to the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of integration efforts in peace-building. The essay "The Unfinished Regional Autonomy

Projects and the Federalist Option,” when read alongside “Integrating the MNLF Forces into the PNP and AFP” from Part 4, starkly and powerfully illustrates how peace building must be closely linked to disarmament and to human development, through both statistical and qualitative data. If anything, one wishes that there was more material on the role of third-party foreign negotiators in the peace process, though the essay on Japan’s participation in the GRP-MNLF peace process is nonetheless illuminating.

One would be hard-pressed to find a single volume that comprehensively covers the complex political history of peace negotiations in the Philippines. This collection comes close to meeting that description, especially with its focus on the various peace processes in the last two decades. It is a useful starting-point for the scholar who wishes to expand her understanding of the Philippine peace process in the last two decades, directing the researcher to other potential sources of information and analysis. The nature of the collection—with the essays written for different conferences, journals, and in one instance commissioned by an international non-government organization—would have made it difficult to come up with a consolidated bibliography, but the addition of such a bibliography would have made this volume an even more valuable resource.

As Coronel Ferrer states in her preface, these particular essays stand alone and were not originally envisioned as part of one volume, yet they stand as a testament to the tenuous, continuing efforts to forge peace in the Philippines, and what we may learn from these efforts. With the author named chief negotiator in the peace process with the MILF just last year, it seems that these peace processes will continue unabated.

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