

The Political Economy of the News Media in the Philippines and the Framing of News Stories on the GPH-CNN Peace Process

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■ Executive summary

The following points emerged from the research:

- The peace process between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GPH) and the CNN (CPP-NPA-NDF) is “invisible”, with nothing going on worth reporting. As a result there is currently very little media coverage of the peace process and no background coverage. The Benigno Aquino government seems to have focused on negotiations with its other insurgency problem, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), with which an agreement was reached in 2014. For this reason, Aquino had set aside talks with the CNN to concentrate on one group at a time.
- The peace process as a news story does not resonate with the public and is not “sexy” enough. Before the Mamasapano incident in January 2015 the Mindanao peace process was not interesting to media audiences, especially those living outside Mindanao. The size of the Mindanao audience is insignificant compared to Metro Manila or Mega Manila, hence the limited coverage, because there is no market for the (Mindanao) peace story. Large audiences bring in higher ratings (and circulation) and therefore more advertising revenue to the media company.
- Generally, peace stories are not popular. Regular monitoring shows that ratings of current affairs programmes usually drop when the peace process is the featured topic.
- Most media coverage of the peace process between the Philippine government and the CNN has been lacking in context. These stories did not have proper background and were treated as if they were no different from street crimes. Television puts a premium on spot news, and contextual writing follows only when significant spot news is happening. The news value that determines coverage is essentially conflict. Most reporting is spot news, such as NPA attacks, and there is no attempt at background reporting.
- The information in such stories is obtained from the military, which is understandably biased against the rebels. The CNN is presented as being intent on causing terror and inflicting harm on people, and destabilising the government.
- Even provincial media reports on the peace process between the GPH and CNN rely mostly on press releases from the government and military. However, local Mindanao journalists are more cautious when reporting the peace process because the prospect of peace in Mindanao is significant to them.
- Conflict has significant news value, so the Philippine mainstream media highlight conflict instead of peace when reporting on the CNN. Journalists are expected to comply with their respective news organisations’ daily story quotas, which prevents more in-depth reporting of the so-called ethnic conflict. News organisations are unwilling to devote more time or additional resources to do a thorough story.
- All of the Philippine news media do not have regular reporters for the peace beat. Reporters assigned to cover conflict with the CNN or Muslims are assigned to the defence beat, the presidential beat or the police beat. These reporters do not have enough expertise to write contextual stories related to the spot news they cover.
- Mindanao journalists complain of a Manila desk bias that tries to generalise stories to the whole of Mindanao, as if the whole island were a war zone.
- The so-called alternative media provide an “alternative” voice or narrative to what the established or mainstream media offer. Considered as having a “progressive and nationalist” perspective on development issues, these media agencies are not owned or controlled by private corporations. They have been closely monitoring developments in the GPH-CNN peace talks and are often able to fill the gaps left by the dominant media.

Recommendations:

- The GPH-CNN peace process should be jumpstarted.
- Public opinion should be stirred up to support the resumption of the peace process.
- The quantity and quality of peace process coverage should be upgraded.
- The media should be encouraged to develop full-time peace process reporters.
- A Centre for Peace Studies and Peace Journalism should be created.
- News media should build a peace constituency of citizens.
- Media reportage should link the peace process to basic survival issues.
- Peace narratives should include background and contextualisation.
- Peace reporting must highlight both processes and outcomes.
- News media should always present the voices of marginalised groups.

Abbreviations and acronyms

AIJC	Asian Institute of Journalism and Communication
BBL	Bangsamoro Basic Law
CAB	Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro
CNN	CPP, NPA and NDF
CPP	Communist Party of the Philippines
GPH	Government of the Republic of the Philippines
IRA	Irish Republican Army
JASIG	Joint Agreement on Safety Immunity Guarantees
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MOA-AD	Memorandum of Agreement on the Ancestral Domain
NDF	National Democratic Front
NPA	New People's Army
OPAPP	Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process
PLDT	Philippine Long Distance Telephone Company

The party organised its military wing, the New People's Army (NPA), in March 1969 and declared its intention to overthrow the national government through armed struggle. The NPA had its roots in the Hukbalahap resistance movement against the Japanese during the Second World War. The NPA drew strength from the social injustices during the time of President Marcos. Many peasants and student activists headed for the mountains when martial law was declared. The two main issues at the start of the movement were land reform and government corruption (OPAPP, 2011).

The CPP organised its political arm in April 1973, the National Democratic Front (NDF) – a coalition of extreme left-leaning political parties, trade unions, political activists and sympathisers – to bolster the fight for social justice. Some NDF members, like Satur Ocampo, ran for office after the 1986 People Power Revolution and were elected.

The NPA armed struggle against the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GPH) armed forces reached its height in the 1980s. NPA rebels attacked foreign-owned and -operated mines, construction companies, and logging concessions, among other targets. They harassed the military in the countryside, while the Muslim rebels battled government forces in Mindanao. It was a time of crisis for the Marcos regime.

When Marcos was overthrown by the People Power Revolution in 1986, the CPP-NPA-NDF (collectively known as the CNN) made a tactical mistake. It boycotted the elections and did not understand the extent of the people's grievance against the Marcos regime. As a result it was left by the roadside as the People Power bandwagon elected an unlikely housewife, Cory Aquino, widow of Ninoy Aquino, to the presidency.

I. Introduction and history: the peace process

The Philippines' 46-year-old Communist rebellion, although now much weaker than it used to be, is currently the oldest continuing rebellion in Asia. Philippine Communist patriarch Jose Maria ("Joma") Sison, a former literature professor at the University of the Philippines who now lives in exile in Utrecht, the Netherlands, founded the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) in December 1968, riding on the wave of unrest during the corrupt regime of former president Ferdinand Marcos.

In a show of magnanimity President Aquino released the then-imprisoned Jose Maria Sison from jail and agreed to a 60-day ceasefire with the rebels. It was meant to be a confidence-building measure to jumpstart negotiations with the CNN. The first formal talks to tackle substantive issues took place in 1987, but were short-lived.

The NDF walked out on the negotiations because of the so-called Mendiola massacre on January 22nd 1987. Seven stone-throwing farmers were shot dead by police when the former pushed back the barricades set up at the entrance to Mendiola Street, which leads to the presidential palace of Malacañang.

Because the new Aquino administration had too many problems to face after the overthrow of the Marcos regime, including seven military coups, it did not prioritise peace negotiations with the rebels, whom it probably perceived as a spent force; also, at this stage the military opposed negotiations with the CNN.

Simultaneously, grassroots support for the revolutionary movement waned. Negotiations resumed under the next president, Fidel V. Ramos, who announced an amnesty and established a negotiation process in 1992.

In the next 20 years the CNN insurgency weakened because of alleged brutal purges from its ranks of suspected government informers and opponents of the party leadership abroad. The leadership and rank and file of the NPA criticised the top leadership who continued to live in luxury abroad. In 2011 the military believed that the CNN had dwindled to some 4,111 members. Negotiations continued off and on during the six years of the Ramos administration (OPAPP, 2011).

Under President Benigno Aquino III the GPH negotiating panel with the CNN was reconstituted on October 21st 2010. Informal chair-to-chair discussions were held in Hong Kong in December 2010. President Aquino, however, gave more importance to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) problem and succeeded in negotiating a peace deal with it that is now being discussed in Congress.

II. Objectives and methodology of the study

While negotiations with the MILF were ongoing the CNN was largely ignored, awaiting its turn to negotiate with the GPH, so to speak. *Quo vadis*, CNN? Will it get the attention it deserves from the GPH? Is it getting the unbiased

coverage it covets from the Philippine news media? What can be done to jumpstart the stalled negotiations between the GPH and the CNN?

To answer these questions we reviewed studies on the reporting of the GPH-CNN conflict; examined current news coverage of the GPH's peace negotiations with the CNN and MILF; studied the ownership structure of the Philippine mass media and its possible impact on coverage of the peace process; and interviewed key informants, like media reporters covering the peace beat, media executives and their role in editorial planning and decision-making, two key informants from the political left, who represented their sectors in the Philippine Congress, and two former government panel negotiators.

In short, we studied the politics and economics of the news media coverage of the peace process between the GPH and the CNN mainly, and the MILF incidentally, in order to answer the above questions.

III. Roles of the news media in conflict reporting

Phillips Davidson (1974) argues that although sometimes the media can make it more difficult for governments to reach an agreement to end a conflict, they can nonetheless favourably influence negotiations. Davidson observes that the daily news habits of diplomats give them access to similar sets of information and opinions. While two parties may not agree with what the media reports, these reports give them common knowledge of the circumstances that they are trying to resolve (Davidson, 1974).

More recently Spencer's (2005) study of the media and peace acknowledges the potential of the news industry to constructively contribute to the development of peace negotiations. Unfortunately, however, on many occasions the media's preoccupation with drama and antagonism fails to "allow space for alternative discourses to emerge which could further contest and open up issues and positions in relation to peace communication" (Spencer, 2005: 114).

The mass media play a variety of roles in reporting peace negotiations. Their main function, of course, is to report the news as it happens, as objectively as possible – but, generally speaking, the juicier it is the better, which often constitutes a problem. This is especially true in free enterprise societies like the Philippines, where the mass media have to earn profits for their owners and therefore compete for their readers' attention.

The “megaphone diplomacy” employed by the British and Irish governments to facilitate indirect dialogue with Sinn Fein and the Irish Republican Army (IRA) during the Northern Ireland Peace Process is one example of how news media can provide common knowledge to parties in conflict.

Well aware that Sinn Fein was crucial to the peace process, the British and Irish governments continued to engage the organisation in the negotiations by using an alternative platform to formal negotiations – i.e. the media – to convey their messages to Sinn Fein, while Sinn Fein employed the same strategy to relay its positions on issues related to the peace process.

Sparre (2001) observes that one of the most important messages that was positively communicated by the media was that Sinn Fein did not have to accept the Downing Street Declaration, i.e. the agreement that laid the framework for how the British and Irish governments would address the problems in Northern Ireland.

Sparre (2001: 101) describes the use of “megaphone diplomacy” in the Northern Ireland Peace Process as a process of “squaring the circle by talking to terrorists through journalists”. She says this technique can be effective in the right circumstances:

the publicity and transparency offered by the news media can be absolutely vital for the success of the conflict resolution process, but it is probably important that the media organization carrying the message is considered credible by both the sender and the intended recipient.

The mass media, however, are often carried away by the drama and emotion of conflict situations, as happened in the Philippines in 2008 when the Memorandum of Agreement on the Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) between the GPH and MILF collapsed. Instead of providing relevant information that could have helped the public understand the agreement, the media added to the confusion surrounding it (Torres, 2008).

The sincerity of the then-Arroyo government with regard to the MOA-AD was also tainted by the allegations that surfaced in the media that her camp was merely using the agreement to extend her term in office in order to push for a shift to federalism through constitutional amendments. In their reports the media failed to discuss that the MOA-AD was merely a preliminary agreement and that a comprehensive agreement was to be drafted

only after the memorandum had been signed (Pinlac & Dura, 2008).

Thus, if wisely used, the mass media can help peace negotiators in a variety of ways. They can be used to float trial balloons or test the waters for reactions to a peace proposal. The mass media can also illuminate issues under negotiation by means of independent research, or by going to the other side and getting its take on an issue. On occasion, governments can make use of the mass media in so-called backdoor diplomacy to ascertain whether the other side is interested in negotiating. We are seeing this at present (March 2015), when the top CNN negotiators, Joma Sison and Luis Jalandoni, have been giving media interviews suggesting that they are ready to restart negotiations with the GPH.

The journalists involved in backdoor diplomacy, however, have to be credible to both sides of the conflict. This brings to mind the role of the late Benigno Aquino Jr., father of the current Philippine president, Benigno Aquino III. Benigno Aquino Jr. negotiated the surrender of the former Hukbahalab leader Luis Taruc to the government of then-President Ramon Magsaysay in 1954. This was a significant feather in his cap when he was a young reporter for the *Manila Times*.

IV. Political economy and news coverage

Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky’s (1988/2002) Propaganda Model has directed the attention of media scholars towards the elements of political economy as the prime determinant of the processes of news production. Herman and Chomsky (1988/2002: i) argue that “among their other functions, the media serve, and propagandize on behalf of, the powerful societal interests that control and finance them”.

The Propaganda Model identifies five “filters” that influence the framing of news. Herman and Chomsky (1988/2002: 2) believe that these elements interact with and reinforce one another:

(1) the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms; (2) advertising as the primary income source of the mass media; (3) the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and “experts” funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power; (4) “flak” as a means of disciplining the media; and (5) “anti-communism” as a national religion and control mechanism.

These filters reflect Carlos Conde's (2002: 68) argument as to why the so-called ethnic conflicts in the southern Philippines "don't stand a chance of being reported thoroughly, sensitively and fairly by the mainstream media". Conde (2002: 68) observes that these conflicts between ethnic groups in Mindanao almost always follow the same pattern:

the company or the government targets an area for "development", sends in the military to quell any resistance by the natives, divides the ethnic group into factions for easier manipulation, the company or the government has its way, the ethnic group continues to resist, the violence continues, with the military's increasing ferocity matched only by the tribe's determination to fight.

In this scenario the military is the most visible actor. So when conflict escalates into violence it is convenient for defence-beat journalists stationed in a military camp to interview and quote the relevant military officer in their stories. As a result the views of the military or government side are thoroughly represented, but those of the other side or even the victims remain unheard. Conde (2002) further observes that journalists are expected to comply with their respective news organisations' daily story quotas, which prevents them from doing more in-depth reporting of the so-called ethnic conflict. News organisations are also unwilling to devote more time or additional resources to produce a thorough story.

The same factor was revealed in an undergraduate study that looked at the profile of Manila-based journalists who covered the MOA-AD (Bahillo & Ducut, 2011). Aside from their personal biases and prejudices against the MILF, the journalists interviewed for this research linked their inability to provide in-depth reports to their respective organisations' daily story quotas.

Story quotas may also be the reason why most stories on conflict only cite a single source. A content analysis study by the Centre for Media Freedom and Responsibility entitled "Covering conflict in Mindanao: terror and the press" revealed that most of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer's* reports on conflict only quote military sources (Rara, 2006).

The circumstances cited above fit with the argument on the third filter of the Propaganda Model – "the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and experts funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power"

(Herman & Chomsky, 1988/2002: 2). Herman and Chomsky (1988/2002: 18) further explain that the "mass media are drawn into a symbiotic relationship with powerful sources of information by economic necessity and reciprocity of interest".

While we perceive the economic aspect as one of the main factors in these circumstances, it has also been observed that stories about conflict still dominate the news media. Conde (2002) observes that from the point of view of Manila-based newsrooms, the whole of Mindanao is basically a war zone and the prime source of the country's bad news. War stories, he adds, sell newspapers and improve the ratings of television and radio stations.

Organisational and ideological levels are believed to be an influential factor in the disturbing image of Mindanao projected in the media. Political and business elites from Manila view Mindanao as backward and recalcitrant – and national news media organisations are ultimately controlled from Manila. This distorted reporting of the situation in Mindanao by Manila-based editors led in late 2001 to the mass resignation of the *Inquirer Mindanao* bureau team, including its editor-in-chief, Carolyn Arguillas. Arguillas, together with her former team from the *Inquirer Mindanao*, established the *MindaNews* in response to the sensational coverage by the national news media of the Mindanao conflict (Lynch, 2013).

1. Reporting on the CNN lacks context

The situation is the same with the CNN. Soriano's (2015) content analysis study of the Philippine media's reporting of peace-related issues revealed that media reports on the CNN tended to focus only on clashes, ambushes, explosions and other violent events linked to the organisation. Soriano (2015: 86) observes that these reports "were presented as if occurring outside the broader timeline of the still-ongoing communist insurgency, and the on-again, off-again peace negotiations of the NDF and the GPH". The study also reveals that these stories were never contextualised and were treated as if they were no different from street crimes. Like the circumstances cited earlier, the information cited in these stories was obtained from the military.

The same findings were observed in another content analysis study of the reporting of the *Abante Tonite* tabloid on issues concerning leftist movements, including the CNN. The study shows that there is an ongoing attribution bias in that the majority of the information cited in the stories comprised accounts from government officials, and *Abante Tonite* almost never cited the CNN as a news

source (Dela Cruz, 2008). The study also reveals that the tabloid never treated the CNN positively in its reports. The data analysed in this study showed that the CNN was “merely presented as an organization intent on inflicting terror and harm among people, and destabilizing the government” (Dela Cruz, 2008: 61).

Even in provincial media, reports on the peace process between the GPH and CNN rely mostly on press releases from the government and military. An undergraduate study that looked at the reporting of *SunStar Davao* on the peace process between the two parties in Mindanao revealed that the government is almost invariably given more mileage than the CNN (Senga, 2000). However, this study also observes that *SunStar Davao* treated stories on the peace process more cautiously than the Manila-based news media. It argues that local journalists are more circumspect when reporting the peace process because the prospect of peace in Mindanao is more significant to them.

The media’s treatment of the CNN as illustrated in the studies cited above seems to contrast with the observations of the International Crisis Group (ICG, 2011), which state that the leftist movement is heavily concentrated in the countryside and that CPP-NPA CARAGA Commander Jorge “Ka Oris” Madlos used community media to publicise the organisation’s activities, making use of local radio stations to announce its operations and even granting them extended interviews. At about the same time, before his death, a CNN information officer called Ka Roger was active in the propaganda war against the military in the southern Tagalog and Bicol regions. He was always available for interviews by the mass media and was often quoted.

The ICG’s (2011) report supports an earlier study of conflict, terrorism and the media in Asia in which Benjamin Cole (2006) observes that the CPP-NPA had maintained professional relations with and direct access to the media, which enabled them to use their revolutionary propaganda to influence media outputs. Cole claims that the CPP-NPA had gained an advantage over the GPH in the propaganda war by exploiting media coverage of the root causes of the conflict such as poverty, landlessness, government neglect and inequity. It is possible, however, that this was true at the time when Cole’s study was conducted, but is no longer the case since 2011. When the “old guard” like Ka Roger died, for example, there was no new blood to take his place, and the movement suffered accordingly.

Radio is one of the most important forms of media that the CPP-NPA are using to reach its constituency, which is largely based in impoverished and remote rural areas. The group would likely use Manila broadsheets and television if it wanted to reach a wider urban audience, which is not its natural constituency.

However, Cole (2006: 67) also observes that although the media provide ample space to the GPH and CPP-NPA, the reporting of conflict and the peace process remains a game of “claim and counter-claim”. News media are still uncritical of the peace process and provide very little analysis and context to help readers understand the situation. However, Cole (2006) argues that it is not clear whether this type of reporting actually matters to the CPP-NPA, because their access to the media enables them to successfully communicate their messages to the public. He also suggests that while the media are more analytical and critical of the government, they should be equally analytical and critical of the CPP-NPA.

Norwegian scholars Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge (1965) inspired the reform movement in the media in order to promote a culture of peace and encourage the media to abandon the traditional zero-sum framing of war and conflict coverage. Galtung and Ruge (1965) say that the media prefer bad news to good news because it is more unexpected. They add that, traditionally, most newsrooms also prefer stories that are unambiguous and have an identifiable beginning and end. The media tend to ignore stories that will require time to monitor the unfolding of events and are more interested in those with an immediate outcome.

British journalist-turned-academic Jake Lynch (2013) proposes that journalists pursue peace journalism, an emerging field of scholarly research that seeks to convince journalists to report in a way that favours peace. This means highlighting the areas of agreement rather than disagreements in any peace process. In other words, rather than concentrating exclusively on the element of conflict in negotiations, journalists should explore other areas – issues on which both sides agree, the suffering of civilians, the trauma of children and women caught in the crossfire, etc. A cursory reading of current reporting, however, does not show much attempt to practise peace journalism.

V. Current media framing of the peace process

On December 27th 2014 the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* ran on its front page a report entitled “Joma [Sison] says peace talks may resume next year” (Mallari & Dizon, 2014).

Sison’s announcement came at a crucial moment in the GPH’s peace negotiations with rebel groups. Eight months earlier, on March 27th, the GPH and MILF had signed the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), an ostensibly final peace deal capping 17 years of negotiations.

In its report the *Inquirer* said Sison “remained pragmatic that the two parties would not be able to reach a final peace agreement within the Aquino administration, which will end in June 2016”. It further stated:

But at the very least, Sison told the *Inquirer* in a message, that the two parties could reach agreements for social and economic reforms and a ceasefire.

“I think there is ample time to arrive at a Comprehensive Agreement of Social and Economic Reforms and a Truce and Cooperation Agreement on the basis of a general declaration of mutual intent,” Sison said.

“There is little time left to make all the agreements up to the final peace agreement, which is the Comprehensive Agreement on the End of Hostilities and Deployment of Forces,” he added (Mallari & Dizon, 2014).

The report also quotes Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Teresita Deles describing Sison’s remarks as “very positive”:

In keeping with the spirit and hope of the Christmas season, I would like to think that Mr. Sison’s very positive remarks indicate that common ground between the two parties may indeed be broadening toward the achievement of a just and durable peace that our people desire and deserve (Mallari & Dizon, 2014).

The report, however, also quotes Deles’s categorical statement through an official communiqué released by Malacañang that

there have been no meetings between the GPH and the NDF to discuss the possible resumption of talks. It is true, however, that friends of the process have been shuttling between the two parties to explore possible parameters for restarting talks at the earliest time possible (Mallari & Dizon, 2014).

Then the report quotes sources from the field, thus introducing the subject of conflict into the narrative, and it is here that we obtain a glimpse of the political economy of the media. These sources and the statements attributed to them are as follows (Mallari & Dizon, 2014):

1. Military spokesperson Brig. Gen. Restituto Padilla is indirectly quoted:

“In a goodwill gesture amid a Christmas ceasefire, the rebels on Friday released two soldiers held captive for four months in Bukidnon province.”
2. Rebel spokesperson Jorge Madlos is indirectly quoted:

“Three more soldiers would be freed by January as a goodwill gesture.”
3. Sen. Antonio Trillanes, described as a “former Navy officer”, is directly quoted on his views about mutual trust:

“I don’t see that [mutual trust] right now. The CPP-NPA-NDF should demonstrate more sincerity in their pursuit of peace. Otherwise, these talks would just be a tactical maneuver for them.”
4. Southern Luzon Command chief Maj. Gen. Ricardo Visaya is indirectly quoted on the subject of NPA attacks in southern Luzon (Occidental Mindoro, Camarines Sur, Albay, Masbate and Camarines Norte) and directly quoted as follows:

“It has been proven that nobody is a real winner in bloody armed conflicts. We are witness to the endless misery experienced by our own people, who are caught in the crossfire.

We must reflect why we have allowed ourselves and our communities to endure 46 years of violence and senseless deaths among fellow Filipinos.”

VI. Characteristics of media reporting

1. Lack of balance in the use of sources

A simple counting of sources in the *Inquirer* article cited above already reveals a lack of balance: there are three sources from the Philippine armed forces, including Trillanes by way of his introduction as a “former Navy officer”, but only one from the NPA. But something more than the issue of journalistic balance can be identified here.

It is a truism that sources of information are essential to journalism – without them journalists would have nothing to produce. Great sources, whether human or documentary, make great stories. Mark Fishman cited in Herman & Chomsky, 1988/2002: 19) notes that

Newswriters are predisposed to treat bureaucratic accounts as factual because news personnel participate in upholding a normative order of authorized knowers in society. Reporters operate with the attitude that officials ought to know what it is their job to know In particular, a newswriter will recognize an official's claim to knowledge not merely as a claim, but as a credible, competent piece of knowledge. This amounts to a moral division of labor: officials have and give the facts; reporters merely get them.

2. Reliance on government and military sources

The Philippine media's reliance on government sources is evident when two days after the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* report cited above, on December 29th 2014, both the *Inquirer* and *Philippine Star* ran a report on critical remarks on GPH peace negotiations with the CNN made by Sen. Trillanes.

"Aquino-Joma meeting a bad idea, says Trillanes", reported the *Inquirer* (Salaverria, 2014). Almost the entire report is about the senator's opinions, whose role in the peace process was not identified, i.e. it was not clear whether he was speaking as a senator of the country or as a former military official.

Another instance of the reliance on government sources, the military in particular – and this case clearly problematic – could be glimpsed in the *Inquirer* report "Soldiers share Christmas cheer with NPA families, Mangyan folk" (Mallari & Barrameda, 2014). This is positive news in line with the spirit of the holiday season, but only for the military. Towards the end of the report it refers to a November 7th attack by NPA rebels in which one policeman and one soldier were killed. The views of the NPA were not included in the report, but noticeably the soldiers spoke for it.

Jake Soriano (2015) found that journalists have relied on military sources more than others when reporting about the GPH peace talks with both the CNN and MILF. He writes,

Surprisingly, the source most commonly quoted in reports about peace is not the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process, or the peace negotiators for the

parties involved in the talks. ... Information from the military is still most cited (Soriano, 2015: 87).

Of more than 600 news reports on the CNN and MILF published in the mainstream newspapers the *Inquirer*, *Philippine Star* and *Manila Bulletin* from January to July 2014, 144 reports cited military sources (Soriano, 2015). In contrast, Sec. Teresita Deles of the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) was quoted in only 79 reports; Alexander Padilla, the GPH chair for peace talks with the CNN was quoted even less, in only seven reports; CPP founder Sison was also quoted in only seven reports; and NDF negotiator Luis Jalandoni was quoted in only two (Soriano, 2015).

Herman and Chomsky (1988/2002: 19) explain that what they call "the heavy weight given to official sources" by the mass media is "partly a matter of cost":

Taking information from sources that may be presumed credible reduces investigative expense, whereas material from sources that are not prima facie credible, or that will elicit criticism and threats, requires careful checking and costly research.

The persistent quoting of sources from the military and the government might help explain why news media reports on peace negotiations between the GPH and the CNN tend to have a specific orientation.

Before December 2014 Sison floated the possibility of another round of talks, while another significant period was the week in March the same year when, coincidentally, the CAB was signed. The signing of the CAB marked a high point in the talks between the GPH and MILF. In the document both parties agreed to an ostensibly final solution to resolving the conflict in Mindanao. But as Soriano (2015: 87) points out, significant events that concern the CNN also occurred in the same week,

Probably by deliberate design (as President Aquino had hinted that something big was about to happen), the week of the signing of CAB was the same week that alleged heads of the CPP-NPA fell to government forces, Benito and Wilma Tiamzon, on March 22 and Andrea Rosal on March 27, the same day as the signing. Add to that March 29, when NPA celebrated the 45th anniversary of its founding.

How did the mass media cover these events in relation to the bigger picture of peace talks with the CNN?

On March 23rd the arrest of the Tiamzons was the banner story of *24 Oras*, the flagship prime time news programme of GMA News. In the report militant group Karapatan was interviewed and told the press that its members were not allowed to visit the couple. Its representatives also threatened to sue the GPH over the arrest.

A longer follow-up report immediately succeeded the first story. It provided more details on the arrest and featured an interview with a source from the military, Gen. Emmanuel Bautista, and with the lawyers of the arrested couple. The military provided details on the arrest, while the couple's lawyers insisted that the Tiamzons were NDF consultants and were covered by the Joint Agreement on Safety Immunity Guarantees (JASIG).

A third report delved into the issue of JASIG immunity and whether the Tiamzons were indeed covered by the agreement. An NDF statement was quoted as saying that JASIG applied to the couple. Former chair of the GPH panel Silvestre Bello agreed with the NDF regarding Wilma Tiamzon. The GPH peace panel, however, was quoted as saying JASIG had been rendered inoperative because the NDF failed to open its files.

In contrast, *TV Patrol*, the ABS-CBN prime time news programme, placed the report on the arrest of the Tiamzon couple tenth in its sequence of news reports for March 23rd. The report of the arrest came after three reports about fires in Tondo, Pasig and Caloocan; a hostage taking; a jeepney incident in Nueva Ecija; an oil price rollback; a feature about Isabela *pancit*; a report about a fake priest; and one dealing with expired relief goods.

The report also featured Karapatan demanding the release of the Tiamzons and quoted the military as saying that the arrest was a huge victory for it. Unlike the *24 Oras* report, *TV Patrol* got the views of Malacañang through Sec. Edwin Lacierda, the presidential spokesperson, who said that the government was ready for possible retaliation.

Compared with news about developments related to the Bangsamoro peace deal, coverage of the CNN tended toward the negative and hardly touched on peace negotiations or where things stood between the rebel group and the GPH. This negative orientation contrasts with the optimistic – although guarded – framing of reports on the Bangsamoro peace deal. This is probably because negotiations had been going on in a spirit of give and take for the first half of the Aquino administration, which

resulted in a peace deal being signed. There was thus movement in the negotiations that resulted in an optimistic atmosphere.

3. Peace reporting on Muslim conflict

Soriano (2015: 87) observes,

One event which both programs [*24 Oras* and *TV Patrol*] aired provides insight into the difference between Bangsamoro reports and CPP-NPA reports in the Philippine media. The day of the CAB signing, March 27, a group of Moros were in Mendiola for a peace rally, expressing their support for this very hopeful development. Nearby, a group of militants were protesting the arrest of the Tiamzon couple for allegedly being a violation of terms agreed upon during peace negotiations. The two groups met, and violence ensued. The reports quote the Moros saying they were gathering peacefully. The militants were portrayed as the instigators of violence.

In Lee and Maslog's (2005) pioneering study of peace journalism, it is interesting to note that the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* and *Philippine Star* were found to be practising peace reporting compared to other leading English language newspapers in Asia. This was despite the fact that at the time the research for the article was being conducted the Estrada administration was waging its all-out war against the MILF insurgents. The study found that 52% of the reports on the Philippine military conflict with the MILF had a peace journalism framing.

News values cannot, of course, be ignored here, and conflict has significant news value. In the case of the Philippine mainstream media, Soriano (2015) observes the highlighting of conflict instead of peace when the media report on the CNN. This observation was made in comparison to developments regarding the Bangsamoro, the MILF and the Moro quest for self-determination. Soriano (2015: 86-87) writes,

Reports about the CPP-NPA tended to focus only on clashes, ambushes and explosions in isolation and these events were presented as if occurring outside of the broader timeline of the still-ongoing communist insurgency, and the on-again- off-again peace negotiations of the NDF with the GPH

This is a significant omission on the part of the Philippine media, because peace issues are not restricted to the Moro conquest for self-determination. Like the Moro insurgency, the long-running

communist insurgency (the NPA celebrated their 45th year this year [2014]) in the country has resulted in tens of thousands of casualties and is far from over. And “neither side will win militarily” is how the International Crisis Group describes the relationship between the Philippine government and the NPA.

And yet most reports in the mainstream media about this other armed conflict have not really been contextualized.

But even before peace talks between the GPH and CNN bogged down, the issue would seem to be a challenging one for journalists to cover. Even if one wanted to carry out sustained reporting on the talks, what is there to report when there is an impasse, or when talks are taking place, but they appear not to lead to any significant developments?

VII. Ownership structure of the Philippine mass media

“Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one.” A. J. Liebling

Journalists’ obsession with conflict as having news value can be traced to the free enterprise nature of the Philippine mass media, which have to attract a wide readership and high ratings to earn profits for their owners. And the only way to do this is to have more conflict – and, we should add, gossip, scandal, sex and celebrity “news” – in the news pages.

The Philippine press enjoys political freedom, but not economic freedom. The news media are at the mercy of their advertisers, who monitor readership and ratings. They are also beholden to their owners, who demand profits as the bottom line.

1. Pre-martial law oligarchs

In pre-martial law days (before 1972), five tycoons, four of whom had vast business empires, owned about 90% of the country’s mass media – newspapers, magazines, radio and television (Maslog, 1994). They were:

1. Andres Soriano Jr., who owned the *Philippines Herald*, Radio Mindanao Network and Inter-island Broadcasting, together with the San Miguel Corporation and various large enterprises;
2. Eugenio Lopez Sr., who owned the *Manila Chronicle* and ABS-CBN radio and television network, together with the monopolistic Manila Electric Company

(Meralco), and controlled the sugar industry, among many others. In 1967 he and his family owned 25% of the wattage needed to run 203 radio stations in the country and controlled 41% of the wattage needed to power the five television stations that belonged to them;

3. Manuel Elizalde, who owned the *Manila Evening News* and the Metropolitan Broadcasting Company, which operated seven radio and two television stations. Elizalde was also involved in mining, import and export, steel and iron, and shipping, among others;
4. Hans Menzi, who owned the *Manila Bulletin* and the leading vernacular magazines at the time, led by *Liwayway* and *Bisaya*, together with holdings in citrus, rubber and coffee plantations, a paper mill, and a trading company; and
5. Ramon Roces Sr., who owned the leading daily at the time, the *Manila Times*, and several radio and television stations of the Associated Broadcasting Company. He was the only one among the media oligarchs who did not have vast business enterprises in addition to his media empire.

One of the pre-martial law business tycoons, Andres Soriano, has admitted that “the newspapers in Manila push vested interests” (cited in Maslog, 1994: 29). A top journalist has confirmed that “most newspapers are extensions of business empires. We are a country where unfortunately, keeping a newspaper is a good defense weapon for his business” (cited in Maslog, 1994: 29).

Another top media executive declared in a speech:

Big business can use their media for the promotion of special interests. Or, negatively, they can hold back legitimate criticism, for fear of antagonizing political allies In the words of one exasperated publisher, “We need our paper like some people need guns – to protect ourselves!” Considering, however, that the business interests owning papers are also in other enterprises, it is not hard to see how they can be influenced or coerced into cooperating with the government (cited in Maslog, 1994: 29)

2. Martial law oligarchs

One of the reasons given by President Marcos for declaring martial law in 1972 was to dismantle the oligarchs’ media empires. The irony, however, was that after declaring martial law, Marcos promptly installed his own business cronies as the new media and business oligarchs. The new post-1972 oligarchs were:

1. Roberto S. Benedicto, who published a group of papers led by the *Daily Express* and ran the Radio Philippines Network of radio and television stations, which were confiscated from the Lopezes. Benedicto also took over control of the sugar industry as head of the Philippine Sugar Commission, and had interests in hotels, shipping and banking, among others;
2. Benjamin Romualdez Jr., the brother of the First Lady, Imelda Marcos, who owned the *Times Journal*, *Manila Journal*, *People's Journal* and several sister publications. At the same time he was governor of Leyte, an assemblyman and ambassador to the U.S., while having major holdings in various business companies, including PCI Bank and Meralco;
3. Kerima Polotan Tuvera, who owned Oriental Media, Inc., the *Evening Post*, *Metro Manila Times*, *Orient News*, *Focus Magazine*, and *World News*. Tuvera was the biographer of Imelda Marcos and wife of Juan C. Tuvera, who was President Marcos's executive secretary; and
4. Hans Menzi, who was the only crony among the pre-martial law oligarchs who retained his media and business empires under the new martial law regime.

The Philippine mass media flourished in freedom after the 1986 People Power Revolution. But unbridled freedom soon led to excesses – sex-laden and gossip-filled tabloids, broadsheets with screaming political headlines, and biased news reports and columns, depending on which publication journalists were writing for.

3. Today's oligarchs

Currently, big business continues to control the big media empires. According to the *Media Times* (2015) the ABS-CBN Corporation is owned by the Lopez family, while the GMA Network is owned/controlled by Felipe Gozon, Gilberto Duavit and Menardo Jimenez. These individuals/families have interests in telecommunications, power generation and distribution, and real estate and banking.

The *Media Times* (2015) adds that the top three national dailies – the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, *Philippine Star* and *Manila Bulletin* – are owned by the Prieto, Belmonte and Yap families, respectively. These people also have interests in real estate, services, publishing, shipping, banking and education.

A recent development is that a new business tycoon has gone into the media business. Manuel V. Pangilinan now owns 10% equity in the *Inquirer* and a majority of stock (60%) in the *Star*. He also owns *BusinessWorld* and the third-ranking television network, TV 5, a subsidiary of his

telecommunications giant Philippine Long Distance Telephone Company (PLDT).

The *Media Times* (2015) says:

The interlocking ownership of huge business and media empires threatens the independence and autonomy of the press in the Philippines. The coverage of developments in any of the enterprises could be easily manipulated or be left uncovered in the news.

An illustration of the influence of the media's ownership was the way in which the media reported the Pangilinan takeover of the *Philippine Star*. Newspaper columnist Roberto Tiglao reported in the *Manila Times* on April 6th 2014 that

On March 28, Manuel Pangilinan, confirmed Philippine Long Distance's PLDT Beneficial Trust Fund had signed an agreement to acquire the holdings of Speaker Feliciano Belmonte's family to become the controlling 60 percent stockholder (Tiglao, 2014d).

Tiglao (2014d) added:

Journalists underplayed or even didn't report this development that would have far-reaching consequences for their industry. It is a development that could mean not just the capture of the Philippines Fourth Estate by an Indonesian tycoon, but the end of an independent media.

The *Inquirer* merely reported the takeover in a bland business news article:

PLDT said in a stock exchange filing that MediaQuest Holdings Inc., through wholly owned Hastings Holdings Inc., would increase its ownership in the *Philippine Star* to 51 percent MediaQuest, which owns other media assets in the country including controlling stakes in TV 5 and *BusinessWorld* and a minority stake in *The Philippine Daily Inquirer*, is wholly owned by the PLDT Beneficial Trust Fund (cited in Tiglao, 2014d).

The real news here, as Tiglao (2014d) emphasised, was that an Indonesian tycoon, Anthoni Salim, through his partnership with Manuel V. Pangilinan, was able to own mass media in the Philippines, despite the fact that the constitution prohibits foreigners from owning the country's mass media.

4. Duopoly

Currently, the television media landscape in the Philippines has become a duopoly, with giants ABS-CBN and GMA News getting the lion's share of viewership. The owners of these media empires also have interests in various other businesses (see Table 1, below).

For example, the Lopezes, the owners of ABS-CBN, also have interests in sustainable energy development, infrastructure, property development, green manufacturing and telecommunications; and investments in manufacturing, electric utilities, solar manufacturing and services, property development, and remittance. This is in addition to their media-related businesses like broadcasting, cable TV and telecommunications, the entertainment industry, movies, music, magazines, marketing retailing, CDs, VCDs, videos and books.

5. New kid on the block

A new player, Kapatid TV, has emerged recently, and although it has the resources to compete with the established players because of financing from the Indonesian Salim Group empire, operating in the Philippines in partnership with the Manuel V. Pangilinan group of companies, it is still struggling to attract viewers.

Rigoberto Tiglao has pointed out an alarming trend in Philippine media ownership. The Indonesian Salim conglomerate has bought shares in the two leading newspapers in the country, the *Philippine Star* and the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, through what Tiglao (2014c) calls an elaborate corporate operation:

The Salim-PLDT media complex could become the most powerful one in the country, since it can combine the strengths of television, print (both broadsheet and tabloid), radio, the Internet, mobile telephony (which PLDT through Smart and Sun dominates) – and of course the financial resources of PLDT as well other major firms under the Salim empire.

The Salim group's ownership not just of Philippine media institutions, but also of utility firms like Meralco, Maynilad Water and PLDT, does not bode well for freedom of the press in the country. The Salim group's business interests are so far-reaching that they invade major activities of the average Filipino consumer. According to Tiglao (2014b):

Chances are, you won't spend a day without a Salim firm getting a cut of your expenses.

When you turn on light, chances are, you'll be making money for a Salim firm, the ultimate parent company now of Meralco (see my column February 24). When you use your cell phone, you'll likely be paying Salim-controlled mobile phone companies – Smart and Sun, which together has 2/3 of the market. If you live in the western part of greater Manila, in any of its 17 cities and towns, the water you pay for is from his Maynilad Water Services, the country's biggest water concession.

When you travel on the expressways, part of the toll you'll pay goes to Salim, through his Manila North Tollways and Cavite, which together make up the country's largest tollway operator that runs 64 percent of the country's toll roads.

If you get sick (and if you can afford it, that is), you'd be probably treated in one of his six hospitals, which include the most venerable ones such as Cardinal Santos and the Makati Medical Center, and the newest, Asian Hospital in Alabang.

And if you're reading either two of the country's biggest newspapers, *Philippine Star* and *Philippine Daily Inquirer* or even the has-been business paper *BusinessWorld*, or if you're watching TV-5, Salim's executives control those too.

This monopolisation of media ownership by a handful of powerful people is not healthy for a democracy. As media critic A. J. Liebling (1960) warns, "Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one". In the case of the Lopezes, Duavits, Gozons, Jimenezes, Yaps and Belmontes, at least we can be comforted by the fact that they are Filipinos. In the case of the Salim group, however, the constitutional prohibition on foreign media ownership has seemingly been ignored/bypassed through elaborate corporate layerings.

It is worth pointing out that ownership of Meralco, the electric business monopoly, has passed from one media owner family to another: from the Lopezes, who own ABS-CBN, to the MVP group of companies through the Salim group, owner of Kapatid TV. In Tiglao's series, he says:

Whatever happened to the old-elite Lopez clan, whose name had been synonymous with Meralco? After the Lopezes bought Meralco from its US owners in 1962, after they lost Meralco to Marcos' brother-in-law Kokoy Romualdez, and then, after the EDSA revolution, President Cory handed back Meralco to them.

The Lopez clan then, in 2009, sold most of the Meralco shares to the Indonesian Salim’s firms. The Lopezes now hold only 4 percent of Meralco.

One of course could believe that Mr. Pangilinan has full autonomy in running the First Pacific empire, and that he is of course the most patriotic of Filipinos. That would be supremely naive, unless one is in a socialist system.

But most of the Meralco and PLDT profits flow not to Pangilinan through his 1 percent or token shares in those firms, but to their owners. The lion’s share would be claimed by Salim, and the rest by the thousand or so US and European portfolio investors in First Pacific.

Pangilinan may be the most patriotic of Filipinos, but what happens if one morning, Salim wakes up deciding to replace him with the best executive the world can offer? He can even just pick from the list of the best CEOs in the world the *Harvard Business Review* annual determines.

And of course, what if, God forbid, Salim passes away, and we learn that the Indonesians had found a way for Salim’s holdings to be turned over to the state of Indonesia, which may have a policy of cut-throat competition with its neighbors? (Tigla0, 2014a).

Table 1 summarises the current chain of ownership of the Philippine mass media.

Table 1: Chain of ownership of the Philippine mass media, 2015

Owner and business	Newspapers	Radio stations	TV stations
<p>ABS-CBN</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Lopezes, through Lopez Holdings Corporation (formerly Benpres Holdings Corporation) Broadcasting, cable and telecommunications, sustainable energy development, infrastructure, property development and green manufacturing, telecommunications; investments in manufacturing, electric utilities, solar manufacturing and services; investments in property development, entertainment industry, movies, music, magazines, remittance, marketing, and cargo services; retailing CDs, VCDs, videos and books 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/ (online news portal) Magazines: <i>Metro</i>, <i>Metro Home & Entertaining</i>, <i>Metro Weddings</i>, <i>Metro Society</i>, <i>Vault</i>, <i>Working Mom</i>, <i>Food</i>, <i>StarStudio</i>, <i>Chalk</i>, <i>MYX</i>, <i>Barbie</i>, <i>Star Magic Catalogue</i>, <i>UAAP</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operates three AM band and 14 FM band stations AM: DZMM Radjo Patrol 630 Manila; also in Palawan, Cebu, Davao FM: MOR 101.9 Manila For Life; also in Baguio, Laoag, Dagupan, Santiago, Isabela, Batangas, Puerto Princesa, Española, Naga, Legazpi, Iloilo, Bacolod, Cebu, Dumaguete, Tacloban, Zamboanga, Cagayan De Oro, Davao, General Santos, Butuan, Cotabato 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flagship station is ABS-CBN Channel 2, regional network of 25 originating stations, eight affiliates, and strategically located Relay stations across the archipelago TFC: U.S., Canada, Europe, Australia, Middle East, Japan, other Asia-Pacific countries via cable TV, direct-to-home satellite, Internet Protocol Television (IPTV), and the Internet through TFCNow! Cable television channels: ABS-CBN News Channel, Balls, Cinema One, DZMM TeleRadjo, Hero, Jeepney TV, Knowledge Channel, Lifestyle Network, Myx, O Shopping International networks: ABS-CBN International, ANC International, BRO, Cinema One International, Myx TV (North America), The Filipino Channel

Owner and business	Newspapers	Radio stations	TV stations
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VHF: Albay, Batangas, Calbayog, Daet, Iloilo, Jolo, Masbate, Abra, Bayombong, Butuan, Mountain Province, Naga, Occidental Mindoro, Vigan, Dumaguete, Olongapo, Surigao, Zambales, Batanes, Bukidnon, Cagayan de Oro, Isabela, Manila, Tacloban, Baguio, Cebu, General Santos, Tuguegarao, Zamboanga, Bacolod, Davao, Iligan, Kidapawan, Koronadal, Legazpi, Agusan Del Sur, Cotabato, Catanduanes, Catbalogan, Laoag, Ozamiz, Palawan, Sorsogon, Bohol, Kalibo, Pagadian • UHF: San Pablo, Pampanga, Antique, Dipolog, Balanga, Rizal, Lipa, Bulacan, Tarlac, Tagaytay, Nueva Ecija, Dagupan, La Union, Tandag, Sibalay, Mati, Lucena, Baler, Roxas, Calapan • ABS-CBN Sports+Action Channel 23: Baguio, Abra, Mt. Province, Laoag, Vigan, La Union, Dagupan, Tuguegarao, Isabela, Bayombong, Botolan, Pampanga, Olongapo, Bulacan, Nueva Ecija, Tarlac, Baler, Batangas, Lucena, Rizal, San Pablo, Occidental Mindoro, Palawan, Naga, Legazpi, Albay, Daet, Masbate, Sorsogon, Kalibo, Roxas, Iloilo, Bacolod, Cebu, Dumaguete, Bohol, Tacloban, Catbalogan, Calbayog, Zamboanga, Dipolog, Pagadian, Cagayan de Oro, Bukidnon, Ozamiz, Iligan, Davao, Mati, General Santos, Koronadal, Kidapawan, Butuan, Surigao, Agusan Del Sur, Cotabato, Jolo
<p>GMA News</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GMA Holdings, Inc. • GMA is mostly owned by the Duavit, Gozon and Jimenez families • Law, real estate, talent management, films, banking, finance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GMA News Online, Philippine Entertainment Portal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24 radio stations throughout the country • AM: Super Radyo DZBB 594 kHz; also in Iloilo, Cebu, Davao • FM: Barangay LS 97.1 DWLS FM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operates a network of 47 VHF and 33 UHF TV stations throughout the country • GMA News TV 11 Manila, Baguio, Laoag, Dagupan, Tuguegarao, Aparri, Isabela, Olongapo, Batangas, Occidental Mindoro, Puerto Princesa, Naga, Legazpi, Masbate, Kalibo, Roxas, Iloilo, Bacolod, Cebu, Dumaguete, Tacloban, Borongan, Zamboanga, Dipolog, Pagadian, Cagayan de Oro, Ozamiz, Davao, General Santos, Cotabato, Butuan, Surigao, Jolo • International TV channels: GMA Pinoy TV, GMA Life TV, GMA News TV International

Owner and business	Newspapers	Radio stations	TV stations
<p>Kapatid TV 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Board of Trustees for the Account of Beneficial Trust Fund Created Pursuant to the Benefit Plan of PLDT Co., part of the Indonesian conglomerate Salim group, more popularly known in the Philippines as the MVP group of companies, named after Manuel V. Pangilinan, although he has a very small percentage of shares Electricity distribution in Metropolitan Manila, telecom- munications, water distribution services, tollways, hospitals, mining 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> InterAksyon.com (TV5's online news portal). Through Hastings Holdings, Inc., shares in: <i>Philippine Star</i> (51% share), BusinessWorld Publishing Corp. (70% share), <i>Philippine Daily Inquirer</i> (12% share) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Originating stations: Radyo 5 92.3 News FM, Palawan, Bacolod, Cebu, Cagayan De Oro, Davao, General Santos Relay from DWFM Manila 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kapatid TV 5 and Pilipinas Global Network Ltd (TV 5 International) NBC-41 UHF TV: AksyonTV 41 Puerto Princesa, Manila, Baguio, Naga, Pampanga, Davao, Zamboanga, General Santos, Ozamiz, Cagayan De Oro, Cebu, Bacolod, Iloilo, Tacloban, Dagupan, Kapatid TV5, Aksyon TV International: U.S, Canada, Middle East, North Africa, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Guam Australia, Papua New Guinea, Hong Kong
<p>Philippine Daily Inquirer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Board of Trustees for the Account of Beneficial Trust Fund Created Pursuant to the Benefit Plan of PLDT Co. has a 12% share through Hastings Holdings, Inc. The remaining 88% is owned by various companies and individuals with the following among the major stockholders: LRP, Inc. (59.71%), Excel Pacific Holding Corp. (13.08%), Inquirer Holdings (10.26%), and Mediacom Equities (10.04%) Inquirer Group of Companies: Online job market matching, information system, global positioning system, delivery and courier services, newspaper and commercial printing, mobile and digital applications provider 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inquirer.net (online news portal), <i>Philippine Daily Inquirer, Inquirer Libre, Bandera, Cebu Daily News, Hinge Inquirer Publication</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Radyo Inquirer DZIQ 990 AM 	
<p>PhilSTAR Daily, Inc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 51.0% owned by the PLDT Group through Hastings Holdings, Inc. Remaining majority shares belong to the family of Feliciano R. Belmonte Jr., a congressman and long-time speaker of the House of Representatives Printing, Internet company 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> http://www.philstar.com/ (an online news portal), <i>Philippine Star, Pilipino Star Ngayon, The Freeman, Banat, People Asia Magazine</i> 		
<p>Manila Bulletin Publishing Corporation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 54.18% owned by U.S. Automotive Co., Inc. Emilio T. Yap has 0.74% ownership Hotel, bank, university, medical laboratory, investment, real estate, automotive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Manila Bulletin, Tempo, Balita, Philippine Panorama, Style Weekend, Travel Magazine</i> Monthly magazines: <i>Agriculture, Cruising, Sense and Style, Animal Scene, Sports Digest, Liwayway, Bisaya, Hilgaynon, Bannawag</i> 		

6. Philippine media's global reach

Because of the Internet, the reach and coverage of the Philippine media have gone global. All media outfits have an online version, and this has allowed newspapers like the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* to compete with television giants ABS-CBN and GMA News in terms of audience reach.

VIII. The impact of ownership on the peace process

The next question is whether ownership influences or affects media reporting of the GPH conflict with the CNN rebels. A series of interviews with key informants involved with the peace process – two former government peace panel negotiators; two leftist congressmen, one of whom was chair of the NDF panel of negotiators; and three media executives who are also journalists themselves – give some insights into the issue.

Does ownership influence or affect media reporting of the GPH conflict with the CNN rebels? The answer that informants gave was a unanimous “no”: big business owners want peace, they all said. They, who are media executives themselves and non-media opinion leaders, did not believe that media owners tried to influence coverage of the peace process. Media owners, it was claimed, would only interfere in such coverage if stories affected the politics of the owners or advertising revenues.

Owners, it was claimed, do not meddle with news departments – e.g. what news to cover and how. Does ownership have a say on news coverage of the peace process? Owners can influence such coverage if they wish (since they are owners), but they do not: “I have not heard of any instance that they have”, said one media executive who spoke for the others.

One respondent, the associate editor of a leading Manila newspaper, when asked about her perceptions of whether and how media owners try to influence the editorial process and coverage of peace negotiations, denied that such a thing took place.

Owners, it was claimed, do not meddle with the contents of their papers as long as these papers make money. They make money when the contents are readable and appeal to readers. For the most part the market determines contents.

Owners, it was claimed, do not interfere with the running of their papers. The editors know when their stories will affect big advertisers and take care not to antagonise them.

Owners and management, it was claimed, participate in the process of new coverage only to ensure that big, controversial stories are balanced, not libelous; that they do not antagonise advertisers; and that the newspaper obtains the views of politicians mentioned in controversial stories.

One of the two leftist interviewees gave a slightly different perspective on the issue of whether and how media owners influence peace process coverage. He said,

In general, the peace process is covered, but there is bias in favour of the official narrative of the government side in the peace process. Its opinions are quoted more and given more weight. In general corporate interest is not sympathetic to the agenda of the NDF and there is a natural tendency to play up the government side.

Understandably, the media cover the government side of the narrative for the simple reason that the rebels are inaccessible in their mountain hideouts. This tends to bias news coverage in favour of the government side.

IX. The alternative media: going beyond simplistic peace discourse

The so-called alternative media emerge during critical times of the nation's history. As the term indicates, they provide an “alternative” voice or narrative to what the established or mainstream media offer.

In this study, the term “alternative media” refers to those media considered to have a “progressive and nationalist” perspective on development issues and are even perceived to have links with the NDF. These media agencies are not owned or controlled by large (private) corporations. Among these media agencies are *Bulatlat* (a weekly online news magazine), Kodaio Productions (multimedia productions) and Ibon Databank Philippines.

Alternative media were present during the Spanish colonial era, with national heroes such as José Rizal, Marcelo H. Del Pilar, Graciano Lopez Jaena, Mariano Ponce and Juan Luna at the forefront of these publications. During US colonial rule and Japanese occupation in the Second World War, alternative media included other

media forms such as typewritten or mimeographed underground newspapers, *zarzuelas* (a lyric-dramatic genre), and vaudeville or stage shows.

The alternative press re-emerged in the 1980s to provide alternative sources of information about what was happening in the Philippines under the martial law regime of President Ferdinand E. Marcos. When Marcos declared martial law on September 21st 1972, the major mass media were taken over by the government and given to Marcos cronies to manage. The rest of the private mass media were muzzled. During this period editors and journalists had to practise “brinkmanship and even self-censorship” to survive and avoid direct confrontation with the Marcos regime.

Despite constant harassment and intimidation, the alternative media defied government instructions on how to frame news stories. Among these people and publications were the following:

the father and son team of Jose Burgos who were behind the courageous tabloid ***WE Forum*** and its broadsheet affiliate, ***Pahayagang Malaya***; Felix Bautista and Melinda Q. de Jesus edited ***Veritas***; Raul and Leticia Locsin published ***Business Day*** (now ***Business World***); Eugenia D. Apostol and Leticia J. Magsanoc published and edited ***Inquirer*** and ***Mr. and Ms. Magazine*** (Tuazon, 2015).

Undoubtedly, the alternative media contributed to the restoration of Philippine democracy.

The “progressive tradition” of alternative media continues to this day. Adapting to current news production trends, alternative media are now utilising print, online media, radio, video and social media to provide information that is unavailable in mainstream media.

In 2014 they formed a network aimed at strengthening cooperation and coordination among alternative media organisations in the country. The alliance has since been called Altermidya, or People’s Alternative Media Network (Olea, 2014).

For the purpose of this study, interviews with Altermidya members were conducted to identify ways to improve the coverage of the GPH-CNN peace talks. These interviews also attempted to identify lessons on how alternative media can fill the gap in the peace process discourse left by the mainstream media.

The researcher interviewed Raymund Villanueva, director for radio of Kodao Productions; Benjie Oliveros, editor-in-chief of Bulatlat.com; and Sonny Africa, executive director of the IBON Foundation.

Kodao Productions is a multimedia outfit that produces video documentaries and radio programmes. It also publishes its reports online via kodao.org. According to what Villanueva said during the interview, Kodao attempts to move away from the mainstream media’s traditional treatment of news: a mainstream media report on the economy, for example, usually treats the government as the official source of information, while Kodao takes a different approach. “What’s official is what the people say In that sense the alternative media contribute to the dynamism of Philippine journalism”, Villanueva explained.

On the other hand, Bulatlat.com, an online alternative news organisation, does not assign beat reporters to government offices. Oliveros said that it assigns reporters based on the issues it wants to focus on, preferring to follow people’s organisations rather than government officials.

The IBON Foundation, a research institution, has the same thrust. According to Africa, it conducts studies and interprets the situation from the perspective of the poor, providing concrete policy recommendations from the point of view of the marginalised sector.

All three organisations have been closely monitoring developments in the GPH-CNN peace talks. When asked about their general assessment of the mainstream media’s coverage of the peace process, their sentiments are as follows:

Oliveros said that the mainstream media’s coverage of the peace talks is often reduced to reporting only the two dominant sides. “When you read news from dominant media, it’s only between the MILF, MNLF and the government, or it’s between the government and the NDFP.”

Oliveros also pointed out the lack of explanation of the people’s stake in the peace process. Stories on peace talks only appear when both sides agree on a specific issue or when they declare a ceasefire.

Africa said that this kind of coverage is “reflective of the low attention given to the broad socioeconomic issues”, and added that the media’s framing of socioeconomic issues tends to sensationalise poverty or is business oriented, and does not reflect the development perspec-

tive. “So if this is the normal mode of the dominant media, it will also reflect how they cover the peace talks”, Africa continued. Glitches in the talks are always attributed to the suspension of a ceasefire.

While Villanueva thought that his colleagues from the dominant or mainstream media are aware of the importance of the peace process story, their stories are still subject to a gate-keeping process.

During the recent peace talks in Oslo, Villanueva observed that Senator Leila De Lima’s alleged sex video was given prominence in mass media coverage over the progress made at the GPH-CNN peace table. Villanueva admitted that his colleagues in the mainstream media are limited by what their editors see as a more important story and which one generates higher readership or ratings.

“In the dominant media you need to shorten your reports in order to give space for showbiz reports”, Villanueva added. The alternative media are not bound by these rules. Villanueva saw this as an opportunity for the alternative media to fill the gap left by the mainstream media in the latter’s reporting.

“Our only limitation in terms of content is to be able to release the story quickly”, he added. Villanueva observed that online portals of major news outfits in the country have recently become interested in the content produced by the alternative media.

Bulatlat.com has had the same experience. Since it started in 2001, its reports have received the attention of major TV programmes. Some of the stories it first reported were pursued by mainstream news outfits. News producers from major networks would seek Butalat.com’s help in getting in touch with its sources.

Based on these experiences, Villanueva believes that the alternative media can play on their strengths. While recognising the limitations of their reach, he said that this should not stop them from producing contextual stories about the peace process. “At least when a researcher puts it online, it’s there”, he added.

Villanueva said that it is mostly journalists from alternative media outfits who are aware of the nuances of the peace talks. “We know what it means when the Philippine government changes its abbreviation from GRP to GPH

and then back to GRP. We know the implication of the terms ‘unilateral ceasefire’ and ‘bilateral ceasefire’.”¹

It is only through this type of reporting that Oliveros believes people will be able to fully understand their stake in the peace process. Going beyond the simplistic framing of the peace process and pointing out its implications for basic survival or gut issues such as food, livelihood, and employment will mobilise people to become involved.

However, performing these tasks also entails challenges. Lack of resources poses major obstacles to covering peace talks among journalists from the alternative media: “During the last two rounds [of the peace talks] we lived thirty kilometers away from the venue and relied on the kindness of strangers to get there and back to our hotel”, said Villanueva, while Oliveros shared the same sentiment.

For Africa, another challenge is to form a larger peace constituency. While the alternative media already have a following, there is a need for more people to understand the peace process, Africa added:

The talks are complicated and speculative, because you’re talking about the future. While the main thing they’re talking about now is stopping the fighting, the substance of the agreement talks about the future Ideas like that don’t tend to circulate.

He expressed concern over the public’s shallow understanding of the peace process.

While the efforts of Mindanao-based CSOs to educate people on the proposed Bangsamoro territory were undeniably unparalleled, people in other parts of the country were left out of this process. This exclusion, according to Africa, is the reason why the Bangsamoro issue was easily derailed by the Mamasapano incident and the political self-interest of legislators.

For Oliveros, a larger peace constituency would result in a better peace agreement, and a just and lasting peace.

While this study shows that mainstream media owners do not interfere in their news organisations’ coverage of the peace process, Africa said it would be interesting to monitor the coverage of the GPH-CNN peace talks when the NDFP presents its Comprehensive Agreement on

¹ Villanueva explained that according to an OPAPP official, the abbreviation “GRP” implies that in addition to the Government of the Republic of the Philippines, there is another “government” that has its own political structure, has its own armed forces (INPA), and imposes its own taxes. In contrast, GPH means only one government of the Philippines. Thus, the latter is preferred.

Social and Economic Reforms, which contains provisions for the nationalisation of public utilities.

X. Recommendations

1. Jumpstart the stalled GPH-CNN peace process

It is the right time to jumpstart the stalled GPH-CNN peace process now, before President Benigno Aquino's term ends, with no less than the two top CNN leaders – Jose Maria Sison and Luis Jalandoni – calling for this in media interviews. Former chief CNN negotiator Satur Ocampo also endorsed it in his January 3rd 2015 Philippine Star column (Ocampo, 2015).

Asked in an interview whether the Aquino government is too preoccupied with the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) now being debated in Congress, Ocampo replied that this is not sufficient reason to dismiss the idea of resuming talks with CNN. The panel negotiating with the CNN will be composed of different people with their own expertise and will be discussing different issues from those related to the BBL. So the two negotiations can proceed simultaneously but at their own pace.

The next question is how to convince the government to start the peace process with the CNN. The problem is that while the government responds to public opinion, at present no public opinion is pushing for the resumption of talks with the CNN.

2. Stir up public opinion to support the resumption of the peace process

In an interview, former government peace panel negotiator Moncupa stressed that there is no public support for the peace process at the moment. Therefore there is no push from the public for the resumption of peace negotiations.

There is a need to stir up public opinion regarding the peace process and bring the process to the fore. Public awareness regarding the process must be increased and a campaign should be started for the resumption of negotiations.

There is a need for a peace settlement, Moncupa said, and the peace process needs to be restarted. He recommended that peace advocates develop a communication

plan to revive public awareness in order to lead to a resumption of negotiations.

In his column, on the other hand, Ocampo (2015) suggests the following steps to stir up public opinion and restart negotiations with the CNN:

- Peace advocates should continue to press both sides to go back to the negotiating table, address the root causes of the conflict and honour all agreements. Notable initiatives have come from the Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform, while last year [2014] a broad grassroots peace movement called Kapayapaan² added its support.
- Late last year a separate, informal initiative³ led by a former GPH panel member reportedly with strong Malacañang links and a rapport with the NDF started to broker a new accelerated timeline, with “doable” targets, for resuming the formal peace talks.

Former OPAPP head Atty. Jess Dureza is in favour of resuming negotiations with the CNN and suggests that news media play an important role in providing an enabling environment for a resumption of talks. In an interview Dureza said,

One way is to interview and write stories quoting statements from sectors supportive of the resumption. These sectors, as talking heads, must come from mainstream and NOT those identified with the left, to gain traction, for example, heads of business sectors or chambers of commerce, etc.

Periodic background materials or statements must also be fed to known newspaper desks and columnists to keep the issue of peace talks alive in the public mind. We need to maintain their attention and interest in the matter. A basic consideration is to create an enabling environment for peace talks to be held. A “public clamour” must be generated, otherwise government will not take the initiative.

And finally, Dureza suggested that

Third party interlocutors (like Norway) must start shuttling between Manila and Utrecht to revive interest and these efforts must be reported by media,

2 Kapayapaan is a loose organisation with members from the church, academics, students, workers, peasants and various people's organisations. The group aims to generate support for the resumption of peace talks between the NDF and GPH. See <http://www.facebook.com/KapayapaanCampaignPH/Info?ref=page_internal>.

3 The group is led by ex-congressman and former agrarian reform secretary Hernani Braganza. According to news reports, Braganza met with key CPP and NPA officials in a rebel lair in Surigao del Sur on December 26th 2014. This initiative is informal and unofficial, but known to Malacañang.

although in very subdued tones, just to nurture public attention and keep the flame burning. If possible, Jose Maria Sison and his lieutenants must be advised to tone down their “attacks” on OPAPP, and instead promote a culture of peace.

This point is endorsed by Satur Ocampo, who said in his January column in the *Philippine Star* that there is need for

the Norwegian government’s sustained efforts, as third party facilitator, to break the impasse. In 2012 and 2013 it sponsored and facilitated informal bilateral meetings to discuss a 2011 proposal for a truce and alliance the NDFP had directly addressed to President Aquino (Ocampo, 2015).

After the current preoccupation with the BBL, the AIJC could organise a series of multisectoral forums on the GPH-CNN peace process. The overall objective is to create multistakeholder demand for the resumption of the peace process and the articulation of views on the GPH-CNN peace agenda.

3. Upgrade the quantity and quality of peace process coverage

These considerations go together. In an interview wise words came from Jess Dureza, who was a community journalist before he became the Philippine government’s press secretary. To quote him:

Peace reporting or covering peace negotiations is a special field. Reporters must have a deep background of the peace process so that stories are not treated like ordinary events, given that there is great sensitivity to context, accuracy, precision of language, etc. A blaring headline can disrupt what otherwise is a positive development in the talks. The rule is: negotiations should be behind closed doors and negotiations should not take place in the media. Contentious issues between panels are best discussed in executive sessions rather than in the public domain.

During my time we continued to give media briefings and backgrounders, and developed a regular pool of media reporters who have some understanding of the nuances of peace negotiation developments.

Prudence (not big headlines and sensational lead paragraphs) and accuracy in press reports help nurture the process. In fact, joint statements or communiqués jointly issued by both sides are standard. (Behind the scenes, panels debate over words,

even where to place the commas, in preparing those joint statements before they are released. I used to call newspaper editors to assign specific reporters to cover the peace process, and not just anyone to jump in at any time.)

The AIJC could organise a distinct series for journalists in Metro Manila and the provinces focusing on the following: (a) a presentation of the results of recent media studies on the quality of news media coverage of the peace process, highlighting strengths and weaknesses; (b) a discussion of historical and contextual issues by scholars to provide background information to help journalists produce in-depth or more incisive narratives; and (c) skills training on peace journalism (or conflict-sensitive reporting).

The AIJC’s experience in setting up the “Website on Muslim Mindanao for Journalists and Other Communicators” could be duplicated for the CNN issue. The website is an online resource for journalists that provides information on the historical, sociocultural, and political context of Mindanao and the diverse perspectives involved, so that journalists can cover the news with greater depth, balance and clarity.

4. Seek media cooperation to develop full-time peace process reporters

None of the Philippine news media has full-time reporters assigned to cover peace processes, which means covering the two insurgencies in the country – those of the MILF and CNN. Any news about conflicts not involving these two groups is seen as a police story and not a peace process story. Perhaps it is time to develop journalists trained to understand the peace process and assign them full time to the peace process beat. If this beat is developed it will mean peace process stories will be given a proper context.

This means training the journalists assigned to this beat in the new concept and practice of peace journalism. If the mass media do not have the resources to spare to send these reporters to training courses, seminars or workshops, funding should be solicited from foundations and NGOs.

5. Create a Centre for Peace Studies and Peace Journalism

This is a catch-all recommendation that will cover the research and training needed to resolve the many problems of covering conflict in the Philippines. The AIJC could serve as a Centre for Peace Studies and Peace Journalism, undertaking research, training and networking activities that could contribute to peacebuild-

ing in the country. The AIJC's track record in peace communication and advocacy includes numerous policy papers and research studies on peace issues; books such as *Muslim and Christian Cultures: In Search of Commonalities* (2002) and *Media as a Battlefield: Coverage of the War in Iraq* (2003); peace-related projects such as the *Communication Program for Court-Annexed Mediation* and *Communication Project for the Code of Muslim Personal Laws (CMPL) and Shari'a Courts*; forums and training activities on peace journalism; and the "Website on Muslim Mindanao for Journalists and Other Communicators".

6. Build a peace constituency of citizens

News media should help to build a peace constituency of individuals, groups, and communities that are not only interested in and following the peacebuilding process, but also express their views and opinions through diverse platforms. Every citizen should feel that he/she owns the peace process.

7. Link the peace process to basic survival issues

The relevance of the peace process to ordinary citizens could be enhanced if media reportage is able to link its impact to basic survival issues such as food, employment, livelihood, safety and security. This enhancement is in addition to framing the stories within broader socio-economic and political settings.

8. Include background and contextualisation in news reports

The need for providing background to and contextualising peace narratives cannot be overemphasised. Background can provide historical perspective, a chronology of events (timeline), a discussion of progress (or the lack of it) and profiles of major players/stakeholders. Context defines the unique setting of the issue.

9. Highlight both processes and outcomes

Peace reporting goes beyond events and must highlight both processes and outcomes. Process reporting presents context, chronology, and the interrelationships of issues and events, while outcomes examine results and impact.

10. Present the voices of marginalised groups

News media must endeavour always to present the voices of the community as stakeholders in the peace process, beyond the usual "official sources". Marginalised groups should be given special attention because of their limited access to media channels.

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Appendix A: Review of related literature¹

The main purpose of journalism is to provide the public with the information they need to be free and self-governing. In a developing story, journalism plays an even more crucial role. Aside from merely informing, it engages, inspires, and activates people to play their roles as free and self-governing citizens (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007). This role is even more critical in a conflict situation.

However, news about conflict is often presented in a “zero-sum game” framework in which it is reduced to a disagreement between two opposing sides (Lynch & Galtung, 2010: 1). In this type of reporting, the public is presented with claims from two dominant parties explaining their respective positions on the conflict in an “us vs them” situation (Lynch & Galtung, 2010: 13). News organisations fail to recognise that there are more than two sides to a conflict. It is generally a complex situation involving different stakeholders whose interests and involvement are hidden (Lynch & Galtung, 2010).

Spencer’s (2005) study on the media and peace acknowledges the potential of the news industry to constructively contribute to the development of peace negotiations. Unfortunately, on many occasions the media’s preoccupation with drama and antagonism fails to “allow space for alternative discourses to emerge which could further contest and open up issues and positions in relation to peace communication” (Spencer, 2005: 114).

While there is vast literature analysing how media coverage contributed to the collapse of some peace processes around the world, scholars also argue that news sometimes helps two parties to reach a common understanding. In his study on the role of news media in international negotiations, Davidson (1974) argued that although sometimes the media can make it more difficult for governments to reach an agreement to end a conflict, they could still positively influence negotiations. Davidson observed that the daily news habits of diplomats allow them to have access to similar sets of information and opinions. While two parties may not agree on what the media reported, they provide them with common knowledge of the circumstances they are trying to resolve (Davidson, 1974).

The “megaphone diplomacy” employed by the British and Irish governments to facilitate indirect dialogue with Sinn Fein and the Irish Republican Army (IRA) during the Northern Ireland peace process is one example on how news media can provide shared knowledge to the parties

to a conflict. During the course of the peace negotiation a British newspaper revealed that the British government had been secretly meeting with Sinn Fein despite the former’s announcement that it would only talk to Sinn Fein if the IRA declared a ceasefire (Sparre, 2001). This media report undermined the confidence of other stakeholders in the peace talks and raised doubts over the British government’s sincerity regarding the peace process.

Well aware that Sinn Fein was crucial to the Northern Ireland peace process, the British and Irish governments continued to engage it in the negotiations by using the news media to convey their positions to Sinn Fein. The latter also used the media to relay its positions on issues related to the peace process. Sparre (2001) observed that one of the most important messages that had been positively communicated by the media was that Sinn Fein did not have to accept the Downing Street Declaration – the agreement that laid down the framework for how British and Irish governments would address the problems in Northern Ireland. The British and Irish governments only wanted the IRA to declare a ceasefire before they were prepared to admit Sinn Fein to the political process.

Media coverage proved to have contributed to the peace process especially during its clarification period. The IRA declared a ceasefire in August 1994. However, Sparre argued that the relative success of megaphone diplomacy was also dependent on a cultural understanding of how the media work, as well as the credibility and ability of the news media to convey messages in such a way that they are not reduced to drama, conflict, immediacy and simplicity (Sparre, 2001).

While the news media positively communicated crucial information during the clarification period of the Northern Ireland peace process, the Oslo Accord between Israel and Palestine suffered a different fate. Palestinian and Israeli leaders, as Wolfsfeld (2001: 113) commented, are “very aware that they are playing to an international audience and, as always, there is a major struggle over who should be cast as aggressor and who as victim”. The news media found it more riveting when the two sides started to blame each other or every time the peace talks collapsed (Wolfsfeld, 2001 in Spencer, 2005). This type of news framing failed to highlight that the Oslo Accord involved interim steps in its implementation. The peace talks collapsed and never reached the stage of a Final Status Agreement (Lynch & Galtung, 2010).

¹ References given in the appendices can be found in the list of references that appears at the end of the main report.

The same type of reporting was employed by most Manila-based news organisations when the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) collapsed in 2008. Instead of providing relevant information that could have helped the public understand the agreement, the media added to the confusion (Torres, 2008).

The sincerity of the then-Arroyo government regarding the MOA-AD was also tainted because of the allegations that surfaced in the news that her camp was merely using the agreement to extend her term and push a shift to federalism through constitutional amendments. The news media failed to discuss in their reports that the MOA-AD was just a preliminary agreement; a comprehensive agreement would be drafted only after the memorandum was signed (Pinlac & Dura, 2008).

When the Supreme Court of the Philippines declared the MOA-AD unconstitutional, the so-called lost command of the MILF launched violent attacks on several communities in Central Mindanao. This resulted in heightened hostilities between the MILF and the government military. José Torres Jr. (2008), former chair of the country's National Union of Journalists (NUJP), observed that media reportage reduced the Mindanao conflict to a religious war: some media organisations tended to label the two opposing parties as Muslims and Christians.

News failed to provide the context of the Bangsamoro struggle, which is deeply rooted in social injustices, marginalisation, and prejudice against Muslims in Mindanao that can be traced back to as early as the Spanish occupation of the Philippines (Pinlac & Dura, 2008). This failure was more evident among Manila-based journalists (Linggao, 2011).

Such practices of framing conflict and peace negotiations around the world can be attributed to conventional definitions of news in many newsrooms – news is conflict. Many scholarly works that examined the dynamics and realities of news production have revealed that factors influencing which story will appear in the news the next day ranged from the personal judgement of reporters and editors to organisational policies and, very recently, systemic and economic factors (Lynch, 2013).

White (1950: 383) first introduced the concept of “gatekeepers” in his study that examined the decisions of the wire editor-in-charge when selecting which stories would land on the front page of his/her newspaper the next

morning from an avalanche of wire copy. In this research, White (1950: 383) illustrated that a news story would have to pass through different levels of “gates” and “gatekeepers”. A US Senate hearing on a proposed bill for federal aid to education, he cited, would have to pass through the reporter's initial judgement as to whether the story was “important” or not. Then it would be transmitted from one gatekeeper to another.

White concluded that gatekeepers' reasons for rejecting news stories are highly subjective. He also observed that the gatekeeper based his/her decisions on his/her own “set of experiences, and expectations of what the communication of news really is” (White, 1950: 390).

White's findings were later challenged by a developing scholarly consensus that downgraded the influence of individual journalist as gatekeepers of the content of news. In their essay entitled “The structure of foreign news”, Galtung and Ruge (1956) attributed the representation of conflict in the news to structural factors arising out of the organisational interests of the news industry.

Their study that examined the presentation by Norwegian newspapers of the Congo, Cuba, and Cyprus crises identified “tuning signals” involving 12 factors such as threshold, frequency, negativity, unexpectedness, unambiguity and so forth that determine the newsworthiness of an event. Galtung and Ruge argued that these factors explain why the media prefer bad news to good news. Conventions in most newsrooms, they added, prefer stories that are unambiguous, and have an identifiable beginning and end. The news media tend to ignore stories that will require time to monitor the unfolding of events. They are more interested in the present outcome rather than understanding a long and complex process.

More recent studies argued that organisational factors are believed to have a significant impact on the production of news (Gans, 2003 in Lynch, 2013). Several scholarly studies covering a number of newsrooms from different countries found procedural and professional levels of influence a strong predictor of journalists' own horizons and role perceptions (Shoemaker et al., 2001; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1986 in Lynch, 2013).

Herman and Chomsky's (2002) Propaganda Model has directed the attention of media scholars towards the elements of political economy as the prime determinant influencing the processes of news production. Herman and Chomsky (2002: i) argued that “among their other functions, the media serve, and propagandize on behalf

of, the powerful societal interests that control and finance them”.

The Propaganda Model identified five “filters” that influence the framing of news. Herman and Chomsky also believed that these elements interacted with and reinforced one another:

(1) the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms; (2) advertising as the primary income source of the mass media; (3) the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and “experts” funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power; (4) “flak” as a means of disciplining the media; and (5) “anticommunism” as a national religion and control mechanism (2002: 2).

These filters sit well with Carlos Conde’s (2002: 68) argument as to why the so-called “ethnic conflicts” in the southern Philippines “don’t stand a chance of being reported thoroughly, sensitively and fairly by the main-stream media”. Conde observed that these conflicts between ethnic groups in Mindanao almost always follow a general pattern:

the company or the government targets an area for “development”, sends in the military to quell any resistance by the natives, divides the ethnic group into factions for easier manipulation, the company or the government has its way, the ethnic group continues to resist, the violence continues, with the military’s increasing ferocity matched only by the tribe’s determination to fight (2002: 68).

In this scenario, the military is the most visible element. So when conflict escalates to violence, it is convenient for defence-beat journalists stationed in a military camp to interview and quote military officers in their stories. The military or government side is thoroughly represented, but this leaves the other side and even the victims unheard. Conde (2002) observed that journalists are expected to comply with their news organisations’ daily story quotas that prevent them from doing a more in-depth report of the so-called ethnic conflict. News organisations are also not willing to devote longer time or additional resources to do a thorough story.

The same factor was revealed in an undergraduate study that looked at the profile of Manila-based journalists who covered the MOA-AD (Bahillo & Ducut, 2011). Aside from their personal biases and prejudices against the MILF, the

journalists interviewed for this research associated their inability to provide in-depth reports to their organisations’ daily story quotas.

The story quota may also be the reason why most stories on conflict only cite a single source. A content analysis study by the Centre for Media Freedom and Responsibility entitled “Covering conflict in Mindanao: terror and the press” revealed that most of *Philippine Daily Inquirer’s* reports on internal conflicts only quote military sources (Rara, 2006).

The circumstances cited above sit well with the concept of the third filter of the Propaganda Model – “the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and ‘experts’ funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power” (Herman & Chomsky, 2002: 2). Herman and Chomsky (2002: 18) further explained that the “mass media are drawn into a symbiotic relationship with powerful sources of information by economic necessity and reciprocity of interest”.

While we see economic aspect as one of the main factors in these circumstances, it has also been observed that stories about conflict still dominate the news media. Conde (2002) observed that from the point of view of Manila-based newsrooms, Mindanao is nothing but a war zone and the source of the country’s bad news. War stories, he added, sell newspapers and increase the ratings of television and radio stations. This distorted image of Mindanao by Manila-based editors led to the en masse resignation of the *Inquirer’s* Mindanao Bureau team, including its editor-in-chief, Carolyn Arguillas. Organisational and ideological levels are believed to be an influential factor of this disturbing image of Mindanao. Political and business elites from Manila view Mindanao as backward and recalcitrant. National news media organisations are ultimately controlled from Manila. Arguillas, together with her former team from the *Inquirer Mindanao*, established the *MindaNews* in response to the national news media’s sensational coverage of the Mindanao conflict (Lynch, 2013).

The case is the same with CPP-NPA-NDF (CNN). A content analysis study by Jake Soriano (2015) on the Philippine media’s reporting of peace revealed that media reports on the CNN tended to focus only on clashes, ambushes, and explosions. Soriano (2015: 86) observed that these reports “were presented as if occurring outside the broader timeline of the still-ongoing communist insurgency, and the on-again, off-again peace negotiations of the NDF and the GPH”. The study also revealed

that these stories were never contextualised and treated the related violence as if it were no different from street crime. Just like the circumstances cited earlier, the information cited in these stories was obtained from the military.

The same findings were observed in another content analysis study of the reporting of *Abante Tonight* on issues concerning leftist movements, including the CNN. The research showed that there is a bias in terms of attribution (Dela Cruz, 2008). The majority of the information cited in the stories were accounts from government officials. *Abante Tonight* almost never gave the CNN as a news source. The study also revealed that the tabloid never treated the CNN positively in its reports. The data analysed in this study (Dela Cruz, 2008: 61) showed that the CNN was “merely presented as an organization intent on inflicting terror and harm among people, and destabilizing the government”.

Even in provincial media, reports on peace process between the Philippine government and CNN rely mostly on press releases from the government and military. An undergraduate study that looked at the reporting of the *SunStar Davao* on the peace process between the two parties in Mindanao revealed that the government is given more mileage than the CNN (Senga, 2000). However, this research also observed that the *SunStar Davao* treated stories on the peace process more carefully than the Manila-based news media. The study argued that local journalists are more cautious when reporting on the peace process because the prospect of peace in Mindanao is significant to them.

The media treatment of the CNN as illustrated in the studies cited above seemed to contrast with the views of the International Crisis Group (ICG). Since the leftist movement is heavily concentrated in the countryside, the ICG 2011 report stated that the CPP-NPA CARAGA Commander Jorge “Ka Oris” Madlos is adept at using the media to publicise the organisation’s activities. Ka Oris, according to the report, made use of local radio stations to announce its operations and even granted them extended interviews (ICG, 2011).

The ICG’s report supports an earlier study on conflict, terrorism and media in Asia. Benjamin Cole (2006) observed that the CPP-NPA has maintained professional relations and direct access to the media that enables them to use their revolutionary propaganda to influence media outputs. Cole posited that the CPP-NPA had gained advantage over the government in terms of war propa-

ganda by exploiting media coverage of the root causes of the conflict such as poverty, landlessness, government neglect and inequality. Radio is one of the most important forms of media that the CPP-NPA use to reach their constituency, which is largely based in impoverished and remote rural areas. The groups use Manila broadsheets and TV if they want to reach a wider urban audience, which is not their natural constituency.

However, it was also observed that although the media provide ample space to the Philippine government and CPP-NPA, the reporting of the conflict and the peace process continues to have a “claim and counter-claim” slant (Cole, 2006: 67). The news media are still uncritical of the peace process, and provide very little analysis and context to help readers understand the situation. However, Cole (2006) argued that it is not clear whether this type of reporting actually matter to the CPP-NPA, because their access to the media enables them to successfully get their messages across to the public. He also suggested that while the media are more analytical and critical of the government, it would be helpful if they were equally analytical and critical of the CPP-NPA.

This type of reporting suggested by Cole requires journalism equipped with conflict analysis tools – peace journalism. The studies cited above mentioned the lack of context and background, as well as of critical and analytical reports of the ongoing conflict and peace process between the CPP-NPA and the Philippine government. Peace journalism is a “remedial strategy” that creatively seeks and communicates to the public sphere habitually unheard but significant views and perspectives (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005: 224).

The conventional reporting of conflict, according to peace scholar Johan Galtung, is violence-oriented, elite-oriented, propaganda-oriented, and victory-oriented. This way of framing news is what Galtung has called war journalism. Peace journalism, on the other hand, is conflict- and peace-oriented, people-oriented, truth-oriented, and solution-oriented (Galtung, 1998 in Lynch & McGoldrick, 2012).

A significant update of Galtung’s dyadic schema of peace journalism and war journalism modelled by Dov Shinar (2007) argues that that this type of reporting explores the background and context of a conflict’s causes; provides space for creative ideas from any source for conflict resolution, development, peacemaking and peacekeeping; exposes lies, cover-up attempts and culprits on all sides; and reveals excesses committed by and suffering inflicted

on people by all parties. For former journalists and academics Lynch and McGoldrick (2005: 5), peace journalism is “when editors and reporters make choices – of what stories report and about how to report them – that create opportunities for society at large to consider and value non-violent responses to conflict”.

Peace journalism first emerged in the 1970s “as a self-conscious working concept for journalists covering wars and conflicts” (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2000 in Lee & Maslog, 2005: 311). However, Lee and Maslog (2005) observed that it did not gain wide acceptance among journalists nor attracted adequate attention from researchers. Most published peace journalism materials are “how-to” manuals based on anecdotal evidence.

Thus, Lee and Maslog (2005: 313) argued that “peace journalism made a leap from theory to practice without the benefit of research”. Their study filled the gap by operationalising war journalism and peace journalism in a content analysis focused on four Asian conflicts: the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam rebellion in Sri Lanka, the Aceh and Maluku civil wars in Indonesia, and the Mindanao separatist movement in the Philippines.

News articles from the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* and *Philippine Star* were analysed to ascertain the extent to which the conflict in the southern Philippines was framed as peace journalism or war journalism. The study concluded that although there are promising signs of peace journalism in the coverage of the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* and *Philippine Star*, the indicators of peace journalism framing are “highly dependent on criteria of a less interventionist nature, for example, an avoidance of good-bad labels, a nonpartisan approach, a multiparty orientation, and an avoidance of demonizing language” (Lee & Maslog, 2005: 324).

Lee and Maslog (2005: 324) argued that these four indicators are “mere extensions of the objectivity credo: reporting facts as they are”. Journalists still simplify storytelling by providing only a set of villains and a set of victims in their stories of conflict, and undermine other stakeholders. Such reporting does not demonstrate the proactive role of journalists in seeking and presenting creative solutions and paving the way for peace and conflict resolution.

Another study by Maslog and Lee (2006) applied Galtung’s concept of peace and war journalism by looking at the news coverage of the Iraq war by newspapers from India,

Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and the Philippines, and by one news agency from Pakistan. The research found that the news media do not display uniformity in their representations of the Iraq war. The results of the content analysis revealed that the non-Muslim countries (India and Sri Lanka), except for the Philippines, had a stronger war journalism framing than the Muslim countries (Pakistan and Indonesia). While these countries are not directly involved in the war, this study found that religion and sourcing are two important factors shaping the framing of Asian news coverage of the Iraq war.

Also a noteworthy observation in this study is the significant differences in war and peace journalism framing between locally produced stories and foreign wire stories. Foreign wire copy tends to highlight war/conflict/violence compared to a locally produced story. Jake Lynch argued that this reflects the perspective of the Western countries involved in the war. However, one could argue that published foreign wire stories may to some extent reflect a newspaper’s framing of the Iraq war, as some gate-keeping is involved in selecting which foreign wire stories are published and which are not (Lee & Maslog, 2006).

The results of the content analysis of wire copy and locally produced stories can be compared to the findings of a postgraduate study that examined *Inquirer.net*’s and *MindaNews.com*’s reporting of the Bangsamoro peace process. Although the perspectives of Western countries are not reflected in this study, it revealed that peace process stories produced by Mindanao-based journalists have more peace journalism framing indicators than news reports filed by Manila-based journalists.

It was observed that *MindaNews.com* stories did not only provide context, but also thoroughly examined every agreement reached by the parties. It also looked at other alternative discourses whenever there was impasse at the negotiating table. Reports filed by Manila-based reporters of *Inquirer.net* showed war journalism indicators, as the website only quoted elite peacemakers who were mostly from the government side. Unlike *MindaNews.com*, whose reports would examine and compare previous agreements with those of the present, *Inquirer.net* only reported what had been said during press briefings. However, stories produced by Mindanao-based *Inquirer.net* reporters displayed more peace journalism framing indicators. News stories related to the peace process were presented with a background and process-outcome orientation. Another factor that increased the number of peace journalism framing indicators in *Inquirer.net*’s reports was when editors based in Manila

would merge reports of Manila-based and Mindanao-based reporters (Abunales, 2014).

Although peace journalism seems to imply the better representation of conflict in the news media, it has still received criticisms from practitioners and researchers. Peace journalism, as argued by one of its critics, views its audience as a “passive mass that needs to be enlightened by virtue of right and proper reporting”, and the critic further suggested that peace journalism proponents were too optimistic about being able to change audience responses by changing the way in which conflicts are reported (Hanitzsch, 2007: 6). Hanitzsch suggested that audience preconceptions were likely to be too strong to be overcome by exposure to different media approaches to key points of contestation.

However, this objection has been answered by studies that examined the responses of audiences exposed to peace journalism, compared with war journalism versions of the same stories. Lynch and McGoldrick (2012) found in their study that people who were exposed to war journalism pieces developed a feeling of apathy and hopelessness, while those who were exposed to peace journalism became hopeful and empathic, and even suggested solutions to the conflict.

The findings of Lynch and McGoldrick’s study are validated by recent scientific research that contests previous assumptions that humans are aggressive, sexually driven, and self-serving. Social critic and author Jeremy Rifkin (2010) highlighted in his work entitled *Empathic Civilization* that the discovery of mirror neurons or empathy neurons suggests that more than the “expansion of power”, human evolution is also measured by the “intensification and extension of empathy to more diverse others across broader temporal and spatial domains”.

However, the news media seemed to have contributed to the inability of human beings to be able to relate to the “other”. McGoldrick (2011) argued that war journalism – which constitutes the conventional presentation of conflict – presents an inaccurate picture of human responses and motivations in conflict situations. She added that this kind of representation “abrogate[s] and suppress[es] a key part of our meaning-making and relational capacity” (McGoldrick, 2011: 125).

Although peace journalism is a promising approach to a better way of framing conflict, the emergence of systemic, political, and economic factors that influence news production poses a greater challenge. The studies on the

media and the peace process cited above paid focused on already manufactured news content. Only a few studies have examined factors influencing the news production, particularly the first filter of Herman and Chomsky’s Propaganda Model – the size, ownership, and profit orientation of the mass media. It is also observed here that the CNN-Philippine government peace process has not attracted adequate attention from researchers. Only a few, if any, have looked at how the CNN is reported in the Philippine media.

The ICG (2011: i) stated in its report that “resolving the CPP-NPA conflict has often taken a back seat to efforts to reach a political settlement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and is frequently neglected by the international community”. Media reporting seemed to have reflected the government’s prioritising of peace and development. Soriano (2015) observed that most reports about the CPP-NPA were treated as if they were reporting street crime and have significantly omitted the still ongoing communist insurgency and on-again, off-again peace negotiations. The news media have thus undermined the view that the CNN problem needs a long-term solution.

Recommendations

Based on the review of related literature, this research found that studies of the media’s coverage of the CNN-GPH peace process are very limited. The international community – including peace and media researchers – has recently paid considerable attention to the MILF-GPH peace process, but has unconsciously undermined the importance of the CNN-GPH peace negotiation. We therefore recommend that funding agencies, academic institutions, and research organisations should pay equal attention to this issue.

There are very few available content analyses of the reportage of some news organisations of the CNN-GPH peace process, or on the CNN alone. While studies provide findings that describe the media’s representation of the CNN, they fail to offer analyses of how structural and organisational factors influence this kind of framing. Scholarly consensus, as detailed by Lynch (2013: 16), suggests that aside from personal judgement, the “political economy of media systems” is being pointed as the “prime determinant ... of journalistic agenda-setting and framing”. We therefore further recommend that more studies should be conducted of the systemic and economic influences on the process of news production in order to identify more informed policy implications.

The review of related literature and content analysis presented in this study revealed that news reports about the CNN tended to focus only on skirmishes between the NPA and the government military. In these instances, the media framed these stories in terms of a “zero-sum game” approach. This type of reporting only creates an image of who is winning and who is losing, but fails to promote a culture of peace. This research suggests that reporters should also highlight peace discourse instead of just recounting the violent acts that are committed.

Newsrooms managers and reporters should also discuss previous agreements reached between CNN and the Philippine government. This is not for the purpose of acting as mediator between the two parties, but to provide the public with information that would allow them to be critical of the CNN’s and GPH’s stance on the peace negotiation. Lynch and McGoldrick (2012) found in their study that an audience exposed to peace journalism material developed a sense of empathy and even offered solutions to a conflict. If exposed to this kind of news framing, Philippine consumers of news may become critical and pressure the CNN and GPH to pursue peace talks.

Lastly, we recommend that the media should go beyond the negotiating table in reporting developments about the CNN-GPH peace process. Conflict is not limited to two parties (Lynch & Galtung: 2010), but is a very complex and multifaceted phenomenon. In this regard, journalists should realise that solutions to conflicts are not limited to Track I diplomacy. There are alternative peace discourses that are often unreported and unheard. Most of these initiatives originate from the grassroots and community leaders. Oftentimes, the media only report what has been said in press briefings, or quote the spokesperson of the dominant parties to the conflict. News organisations should allow their reporter to go beyond this type of framing and give a voice to peace proposals from the ground.

The CNN may say that it represents the oppressed and marginalised, but this should not stop a media organisation from being critical of it. Therefore it is important that a reporter should listen to voices from the ground independently.

Appendix B: Content analysis: news media framing of stories on the peace process

Two days after Christmas 2014, on December 27th, the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* ran on its front page the report “Joma says peace talks may resume next year”.

“Joma” is Jose Maria Sison, founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), whose armed wing, the New People’s Army (NPA), has been waging one of the longest-running insurgencies in the world (Palatino, 2014).

The National Democratic Front (NDF) of the CPP has been in on-again off-again peace talks with the Government of the Philippines (GPH) since the Corazon Aquino administration in 1986 (OPAPP, 2011).

Sison’s announcement came at a crucial moment in Philippine peace negotiations with rebel groups. Eight months previously, on March 27th, the GPH and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) signed the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), an ostensibly final peace deal capping 17 years of negotiations.

In the report, the *Inquirer* said Sison “remained pragmatic that the two parties would not be able to reach a final peace agreement within the Aquino administration, which will end in June 2016”.

It further reads,

But at the very least, Sison told the *Inquirer* in a message that the two parties could reach agreements for social and economic reforms and a ceasefire.

“I think there is ample time to arrive at a Comprehensive Agreement of Social and Economic Reforms and a Truce and Cooperation Agreement on the basis of a general declaration of mutual intent,” Sison said.

“There is little time left to make all the agreements up to the final peace agreement, which is the Comprehensive Agreement on the End of Hostilities and Deployment of Forces,” he added.

Meanwhile, the same report also quotes Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Teresita Deles describing Sison’s remarks as “very positive”:

In keeping with the spirit and hope of the Christmas season, I would like to think that Mr. Sison’s very

positive remarks indicate that common ground between the two parties may indeed be broadening toward the achievement of a just and durable peace that our people desire and deserve.

The report, however, also quotes Deles categorically stating through an official statement released by Malacañang that

there have been no meetings between the GPH and the NDF to discuss the possible resumption of talks. It is true, however, that friends of the process have been shuttling between the two parties to explore possible parameters for restarting talks at the earliest time possible.

For context, the report offers the following history of the NPA, as well as a summary of the timeline of the peace talks with the rebel group:

The New People’s Army (NPA), the CPP’s armed wing, has been waging a Maoist-inspired war against the government for the past 45 years, considered one of the world’s longest-running communist rebellion.

The protracted war has claimed more than 40,000 lives, according to government figures. Despite a series of peace talks by successive presidents, peace remains elusive.

The peace negotiations have been stalled since 2004, with both parties adamant in pushing for their respective preconditions before the start of the negotiations.

The last breakdown of the talks occurred in February last year.

Then the story quotes sources from the field, thus introducing conflict in the narrative, and it is here that we get a glimpse of the political economy of the media.

These sources and the statements that were attributed to them are as follows:

1. Military spokesperson Brig. Gen. Restituto Padilla, indirectly quoted:

“In a goodwill gesture amid a Christmas ceasefire, the rebels on Friday released two soldiers held captive for four months in Bukidnon province.”

2. Rebel spokesperson Jorge Madlos, indirectly quoted:

“Three more soldiers would be freed by January as a goodwill gesture.”

3. Sen. Antonio Trillanes, described as a former Navy officer, directly quoted on his views about mutual trust:

“I don’t see that [mutual trust] right now. The CPP-NPA-NDF should demonstrate more sincerity in their pursuit of peace. Otherwise, these talks would just be a tactical maneuver for them.”

4. Southern Luzon Command (Solcom) chief Maj. Gen. Ricardo Visaya, indirectly quoted on NPA attacks in Southern Luzon (Occidental Mindoro, Camarines Sur, Albay, Masbate and Camarines Norte) and directly quoted:

“It has been proven that nobody is a real winner in bloody armed conflicts. We are witness to the endless misery experienced by our own people, who are caught in the crossfire.

“We must reflect why we have allowed ourselves and our communities to endure 46 years of violence and senseless deaths among fellow Filipinos.”

A simple count alone already reveals a lack of balance: there are three sources from the Philippine Armed Forces, including Trillanes by way of his introduction as a “former Navy officer”, but only one from the NPA. But something more than poor journalistic balance can be seen here.

It is a truism that sources of information are essential to journalism, without which journalists would have nothing to produce. Great sources, whether human or documentary, make great stories. But as Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky write in their influential book *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (1988), a propaganda system is at work in the mass media, where “money and power are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalize dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public”.

One of such “filters” in the model is the sourcing of information, and the reliance of journalists on sources from government bureaucracies or from business corporations. Herman and Chomsky (1988) state:

The mass media are drawn into a symbiotic relationship with powerful sources of information by economic necessity and reciprocity of interest. The media need a steady, reliable flow of the raw material of news. They have daily news demands and imperative news schedules that they must meet. They cannot afford to have reporters and cameras at all places where important stories may break. Economics dictates that they concentrate their resources where significant news often occurs, where important rumors and leaks abound, and where regular press conferences are held.

They quote Mark Fishman in noting that

Newsworkers are predisposed to treat bureaucratic accounts as factual because news personnel participate in upholding a normative order of authorized knowers in the society. Reporters operate with the attitude that officials ought to know what it is their job to know In particular, a newsworker will recognize an official's claim to knowledge not merely as a claim, but as a credible, competent piece of knowledge. This amounts to a moral division of labor: officials have and give the facts; reporters merely get them.

This reliance on sources from the government is evident when two days after the reports referred to above, on December 29th, both the *Inquirer* and *Philippine Star* ran a report on critical remarks on GPH peace negotiations with the CPP-NPA-NDF made by Sen. Trillanes. "P-Noy [i.e. Benigno Aquino III]-Joma meeting a bad idea, says Trillanes", reported the *Inquirer*. Almost the entire report is about the opinions of the senator, but his role in the peace process was not identified, i.e. whether he was speaking as a senator of the country, or as a former military official. The report reads:

Not a good idea

Sen. Antonio Trillanes IV has thumbed down a possible meeting between President Aquino and Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founding chair Jose Maria 'Joma' Sison, even as he expressed pessimism about the prospect of successful peace talks given the "mountain of distrust" between the two parties.

Trillanes also said Sison's self-invite would be distasteful for a head of a sovereign state.

"You're practically demanding that he meet with you. It should be President Aquino who should initiate [the meeting]," Trillanes said on radio station *dzBB*.

Trillanes said confidence-building measures should be undertaken before any meeting could take place.

"Otherwise, such a meeting would be a futile exercise," he told the *Inquirer*.

Trillanes said that if Aquino really wants the meeting to take place, he would work for it to happen, as what he did when he met quietly with Moro Islamic Liberation Front chief Murad Abraham.

The senator said he would believe that a meeting between the CPP and the government will take place if the invitation would come from the President himself.

"If [the President] really wants it, there would be no need for Joma Sison to announce that he is looking forward to meeting [the President] because it means there is no such schedule," he said.

"Sison's statements are just propaganda," Trillanes said.

The senator also said that the Aquino administration barely has two years left in its term, and if talks would at all progress, it would be in the next administration.

"That's good because there would be a clean slate. There would be new personalities and a new beginning," Trillanes said.

Otherwise, the senator said it would result in a half-baked peace agreement and the state would suffer in the end.

The last part of the report briefly quotes Senate President Franklin Drilon saying that he supports the revival of the GPH peace talks with the CPP-NPA-NDF.

"It is with guarded optimism that we look forward to the achievement of a final settlement. I support the effort to restart the negotiation," Drilon was quoted as saying.

The *Philippine Star*, meanwhile, reported on the same day that "Trillanes doubts sincerity of CPP in peace talks."

Unlike the *Inquirer* report, no source was quoted other than the senator. His being a soldier, however, was mentioned:

He [Trillanes] also frowned at reports that CPP founder Jose Maria Sison is seeking temporary passes

for 500 consultants as part of confidence-building measures.

Trillanes lamented that after being given safe conduct pass, the freed political detainees only return to the mountains and again kill soldiers.

“If you were the soldier and this was done to you time and time again ... will you now take his [Sison’s] word for it?” he asked in Filipino.

Another instance of the reliance on government sources, the military in particular – and this case is clearly problematic – could be glimpsed in the *Inquirer* report entitled “Soldiers share Christmas cheer with NPA families, Mangyan folk”. Published a day before Sison’s December 27th announcement, the report is about soldiers going around homes in Oriental Mindoro sharing *noche buena* gifts “with families of those believed to be active members of the New People’s Army (NPA)”.

The sources of the story were all from the military: Maj. Gen. Ricardo Visaya, Solcom commander; Maj. Angelo Guzman, Solcom spokesperson; Lt. Col. Ariel Mabagos, commander of the 4th Infantry Battalion; and Lt. June Matugas, leader of the soldiers who visited the families in Mindoro.

This is positive news in line with the spirit of the holiday season, but only for the military. Towards the end, the report refers to a November 7th attack by NPA rebels in which one policeman and one soldier were killed.

The views of the NPA did not appear in the report, but noticeably it was the soldiers who spoke for them, as can be seen in this portion of the article:

Mabagos said his unit was able to gather support from local government units, partner agencies and various stakeholders for the *noche buena* gifts for the beneficiaries.

He said they were received well by the families of rebels.

Citing Matugas’ report, Guzman said some of the recipients of the Christmas goodies admitted they had been longing for their kin inside the revolutionary movement.

According to Guzman, a recipient told Matugas she would convince her son to lay down his arms and abandon the armed struggle.

Maj. Gen. Ricardo Visaya, Solcom commander, said the gestures of Army soldiers in Oriental Mindoro showed the sincerity of the Yuletide ceasefire declaration of the military against communist rebels.

In “Reporting peace: writing the first draft of history”, which was published in the Centre for Media Freedom and Responsibility’s annual magazine, *Media Times*, Jake Soriano (2015) found that journalists had relied on military sources more than others when reporting on the GPH peace talks with both the CPP-NPA-NDF and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). He writes:

Surprisingly, the source most commonly quoted in reports about peace is not the Presidential Adviser on the Peace process, or the peace negotiators for the parties involved in the talks. ... Information from the military is still most cited.

From more than 600 news reports on the CPP-NPA-NDF and the MILF published in the mainstream newspapers the *Inquirer*, *Philippine Star* and *Manila Bulletin* from January to July 2014, 144 reports quoted sources from the military (Soriano, 2015).

OPAPP Secretary Teresita Deles, in contrast, was quoted in only 79 reports; Alexander Padilla, the GPH chair for peace talks with the CPP-NPA-NDF was quoted even less, in only seven reports; CPP founder Sison was quoted in also only seven reports; and NDF negotiator Luis Jalandoni in only two (Soriano, 2015).

Herman and Chomsky (1988) explain that what they call “the heavy weight given to official sources” by the mass media is “partly a matter of cost”. They write:

Taking information from sources that may be presumed credible reduces investigative expense, whereas material from sources that are not *prima facie* credible, or that will elicit criticism and threats, requires careful checking and costly research.

The persistent quoting of sources from the military and the government might help to explain why news media reports on peace negotiations between the GPH and the CPP-NPA-NDF lean towards a specific orientation.

Before December 2014, when Sison floated the possibility of another round of talks, another significant period was the week in March the same year when, coincidentally, the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) was signed.

The signing of the CAB marked a high point in the talks between the GPH and the MILF. In signing this document, both parties agreed to an ostensibly final solution to resolving the conflict in Mindanao, southern Philippines.

But as Soriano (2015) points out, significant events that concern the CPP-NPA-NDF also occurred in the same week:

Probably by deliberate design (as President Aquino had hinted that something big is about to happen), the week of the signing of CAB was the same week that alleged heads of the CPP-NPA fell to government forces, Benito and Wilma Tiamzon on March 22 and Andrea Rosal on March 27, the same day as the signing. Add to that March 29, when NPA celebrated the 45th anniversary of its founding.

How did the mass media cover these events in relation to the bigger picture of peace talks with the CPP-NPA-NDF?

On March 23rd the arrest of the Tiamzons was the banner story of *24 Oras*, the flagship primetime news programme of *GMA News*. In the report, the militant group Karapatan was interviewed and told the press that its members were not allowed to visit the couple. It also threatened to sue the government.

A longer follow-up report immediately succeeded the first story. It provided more details on the arrest, and featured an interview with a source from the military, Gen. Emmanuel Bautista, and from the side of the arrested couple, their lawyers.

The military provided details on the arrest. The lawyers of the couple meanwhile insisted that the Tiamzons are consultants of the NDF, and are covered by the Joint Agreement on Safety Immunity Guarantees (JASIG). A third report delved into the issue of JASIG immunity and whether the Tiamzons were indeed covered by the agreement.

The NDF was quoted as saying that JASIG applies. Former GPH panel chair Silvestre Bello agreed with the NDF regarding Wilma Tiamzon. The GPH peace panel, however, was quoted as saying that JASIG has been rendered inoperative because the NDF failed to open its files.

In contrast, *TV Patrol*, the primetime news programme of *ABS-CBN*, placed the report on the arrest of the Tiamzon couple tenth in its sequence of news reports for March

23rd. The report of the arrest came after three segments about fires in Tondo, Pasig and Caloocan; a hostage taking; a jeepney incident in Nueva Ecija; an oil price decrease; a feature about Isabela Pancit; a report of fake priest; and expired relief goods.

The report also featured Karapatan demanding the release of the Tiamzons. It quoted the military saying that the arrest was a huge victory.

And unlike the *24 Oras* report, *TV Patrol* got the views of Malacañang through Sec. Edwin Lacierda. The presidential spokesperson said that the government was ready for possible retaliation.

Compared with news about developments related to the Bangsamoro peace deal, coverage of the CPP-NPA-NDF leaned toward the negative and hardly touched on the peace negotiations, or where things stood between the rebel group and the GPH.

The negative orientation contrasts with the optimistic, although guarded, framing of reports on the Bangsamoro. Soriano (2015) observes:

One event which both programs [*24 Oras* and *TV Patrol*] aired provides insight into the difference between Bangsamoro reports and CPP-NPA reports in the Philippine media. The day of the CAB signing, March 27, a group of Moros were in Mendiola for a peace rally, expressing their support for this very hopeful development. Nearby, a group of militants were protesting the arrest of the Tiamzon couple for allegedly being a violation of terms agreed upon during peace negotiations. The two groups met, and violence ensued. The reports quote the Moros saying they were gathering peacefully. The militants were portrayed as the instigators of violence.

News values cannot of course be ignored here, and conflict is one significant news value.

Sky Schaudt and Serena Carpenter (2009) of the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University offer the following definition of news values:

Traditional journalists have historically relied on news values to determine whether a story was worthy of publication News values have come to include categories such as conflict, human interest, magni-

tude, unusual nature, prominence, proximity, tragedy and timeliness to name a few.

Schaudt and Carpenter analysed the most-viewed stories on 15 community websites in Arizona in an attempt to understand whether traditional news values still play a significant role in online publications.

They reveal in their paper “The news that’s fit to click: an analysis of online news values and preferences present in the most-viewed stories on azcentral.com” (2009) that proximity and conflict were the news values most preferred by readers. The news values least preferred, meanwhile, were timeliness and prominence. These findings, however, were limited only to a particular location and time period. Still, they could provide clues as to why conflict is still attractive for newsrooms and journalists, and why timeliness is not a guarantee of prominence, or even publication or broadcast.

In the case of the Philippine mainstream media, Soriano (2015) observed the highlighting of conflict instead of peace when media outlets reported on the CPP-NPA-NDF. This observation was made in comparison with developments regarding the Bangsamoro, the MILF and the Moro quest for self-determination. Soriano writes:

Reports about the CPP-NPA tended to focus only on clashes, ambushes and explosions in isolation and these events were presented as if occurring outside of the broader timeline of the still-ongoing communist insurgency, and the on-again- off-again peace negotiations of the NDF with the GPH.

This is a significant omission on the part of the Philippine media, because peace issues are not restricted to the Moro conquest for self-determination. Numbers related to this other war mark it as equally needing a long-term solution, like solutions being sought in Mindanao. Like the Moro insurgency, the long-running communist insurgency (the NPA celebrated their 45th year this [2014] year) in the country has resulted in tens of thousands of casualties and is far from over. And “neither side will win militarily” is how the International Crisis Group describes the relationship between the Philippine government and the NPA.

And yet most reports in the mainstream about this other armed conflict has not really been contextualized.

But even before peace talks between the GPH and the CPP-NPA-NDF bogged down, the issue would seem to be a challenging one for journalists to cover.

Even if one wanted a sustained reporting on the talks, what is there to report on when there is an impasse, or when there are talks, but they appear not to lead to any development?

In June 2012 the parties met in Oslo, Norway, for two days to talk about the resumption of formal peace negotiations. The *Inquirer* reported briefly on this, quoting extensively from Ruth de Leon, whom the report identified as the “executive director of the NDFP International Information Office”, who issued an email statement after the meeting quoting the joint communiqué issued by the GPH-NDFP. The full text of this story, “Reds, gov’t peace panel held two-day talk in Oslo”, reads:

Lucena City, Philippines – Representatives from the government and communist-led National Democratic Front of the Philippines held a two-day meeting in Oslo, Norway to pave the way for the resumption of formal peace negotiation to end the more than four decades of armed conflict in the country.

“The Parties have agreed to continue meaningful discussions of concerns and issues raised by both sides on June 14 and 15, 2012 in Oslo, to pave the way for the resumption of the formal talks in the peace negotiations in order to resolve the armed conflict and attain a just and lasting peace,” Ruth de Leon, executive director of the NDFP International Information Office, said in an email statement sent Sunday morning quoting the joint communiqué issued by the GPH (Government of the Republic of the Philippines)-NDFP after the meeting.

The government and the communist rebels have yet to return to the peace table after they first met in Oslo on February last year.

The last attempt to talk peace reached an impasse following a disagreement over the release of detained communist rebels. The government countered that the discordant demands from the rebels impede the resumption of the peace talks.

De Leon said the government panel was composed of Alexander Padilla, chairperson; Efren Moncupa and Jurgette Honculada, panel members; Paulyng Sicam,

consultant; and Maria Carla Villarta, director and secretariat head.

The communist negotiating panel was led by Luis Jalandoni, NDFFP chairperson; Fidel Agcaoili and Julieta de lima, panel members; Jose Ma. Sison, chief political consultant; and Rachel Pastores, legal consultant.

De Leon said the Royal Norwegian government (RNG) acted as third party facilitator and was represented by Ambassador Ture N. L. Lundh, ambassador of RNG to the Philippines; Knut Solem and Sverre Johan Kvale, senior adviser, Section for Peace and Reconciliation, Foreign Ministry.

Former Senator Wigberto Tañada attended the meeting as observer, De Leon said.

De Leon said the NDFP team raised the following concerns and issues during the meeting:

Respect for and compliance with all bilateral agreements without qualification. The bilateral agreements were signed without reservation. Elaboration or amendment to the agreements must be by mutual agreement of both parties.

Release of all 356 political prisoners in accordance with the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL) and the Hernandez political offense doctrine.

Respect for and compliance with the Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees (JASIG).

Release of all 14 NDFP Consultants and JASIG-protected NDFP personnel.
Independent investigation of the extrajudicial killing of NDFP Political Consultant Sotero Llamas and the enforced disappearances of Leo Velasco, Prudencio Calubid, Rogelio Calubad and other NDFP consultants, family and staff.

Recognition of GPH/GPH responsibility for instigating raids on NDFP office, JMS (Jose Ma Sison) and other NDFP personnel in August 2007.

Reconstruction of Document of Identification (DI) list; use of encrypted photos as legitimate photos.

Rectification of “terrorist listing” of CPP, NPA and Prof. Jose Ma. Sison by US and other foreign governments being declared by Secretary Deles as “sovereign right” of these foreign governments (February 2004) and “welcomed” by former GPH/GPH President Gloria Arroyo and declared by her as “not intervention in internal affairs” of the Philippines (August 2002).

Indemnification of victims of human rights violations under the Marcos regime in connection with the human rights litigation in the US as provided for in the CARHRIHL.

De Leon said government compliance with their concerns could open the way for the resumption of formal peace talks.

De Leon said the NDFP have also responded to the government concern and issues on the declaration of ceasefire.

“Regarding the proposal for ceasefire and related matters, our two panels can discuss these in connection with an earlier proposal of the NDFP for a Concise Agreement for an Immediate Just Peace as well as with the later proposal for truce and alliance submitted directly to your President and considered as subject matter of the special track,” De Leon said quoting the NDFP panel.

De Leon said the NDFP is also ready to engage the government in a discussion on the implementation of the 1998 GPH-NDFP Joint Agreement in Support of Socioeconomic Projects or Private Development Organizations and Institutes.

The communist guerilla war, one of the longest and deadliest in Asia, already claimed more than 40,000 lives, according to government figures and despite a series of peace talks by successive presidents, peace remains elusive.

The on and off peace talks between the government and the communist rebels have been stalled since 2004 because both parties were adamant in pushing for their respective preconditions before the start of the talks.

What was the result of this meeting?

In September that same year, months after the June meeting in Oslo, former Bayan Muna party list Representative Satur Ocampo in his “At ground level” column for the

Philippine Star would provide a brief summary: “No meeting of minds there,” he wrote.

In the same column, Ocampo would also provide a 20-year timeline of the peace talks from the Ramos to the present Aquino administration, lamenting that “the GPH-NDFP peace talks are in limbo, dampening the mood to celebrate what could have been a milestone in the long quest for peace”.

In full, the report, entitled “Will GPH-NDFP peace talks resume?”, reads:

Today, September 1, marks the 20th year of the signing of The Hague Joint Declaration between the Philippine Government and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines. The agreement laid the basic principles and the four-point substantive agenda that have guided, since 1995, the on-and-off formal talks aimed at ‘resolving the armed conflict and attaining a just and lasting peace.’

But now the GPH-NDFP peace talks are in limbo, dampening the mood to celebrate what could have been a milestone in the long quest for peace.

Let us look back briefly to see what happened over 20 years:

- President Fidel Ramos (who, with Juan Ponce Enrile, had blocked the initial peace talks under the Cory Aquino government) initiated the exploratory talks that led to the signing of The Hague Declaration. Under his watch, the peace negotiations produced 10 signed agreements.

Among these are the Joint Agreement on Security and Immunity Guarantees (JASIG) and the landmark Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL), the first major accord in the four-point agenda.

- President Joseph Estrada approved the CARHRIHL by signing it on August 8, 1998 (NDFP Chair Mariano Orosa had signed it on April 10 that year). But he later abandoned the peace talks and launched an “all-out war” both against the MILF and the CPP-NPA.

Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo revived the talks in 2001 but suspended them soon after, and kept them

suspended till the end of her nine-year administration. Instead she pursued, in vain, a two-part vicious counterinsurgency program dubbed as Oplan Bantay-Laya.

Still, the Arroyo government grudgingly signed two supplemental agreements after the controversial 2004 presidential elections.

- P-Noy, even before he became President, vowed to “revive the peace process on the basis of a comprehensive understanding of the root causes of the conflict, under clear policies that pave the way ahead...” He restarted the GPH-NDFP peace talks in February 2011.

The two sides reaffirmed the 12 previously signed accords, and agreed to begin implementing the CARHRIHL by convening its Joint Monitoring Committee. They even agreed to accelerate — within 18 months — the pace of the negotiations on the remaining topics of the agenda.

But as formal negotiations on social and economic reforms were to resume in June 2011, the talks bogged down, ironically, over disagreements on how to interpret and implement the agreements the two panels had signed and reaffirmed — particularly the JASIG.

The GPH panel virtually threw a monkey wrench into the talks by stating, in writing, that The Hague Joint Declaration has become a “document of perpetual division” between the parties.

Thus, after 14 months the prospects for resuming the talks remain uncertain.

Throughout that period, however, the Royal Norwegian government sustained efforts to resume the talks. Last June 14-15 the third-party facilitator, Ambassador Ture Lundh, succeeded in getting the two parties to hold bilateral discussions in Oslo.

Dubbed as “a non-meeting” because there was no agreed agenda, the discussions enabled each side to raise issues and concerns to the other side. On June 15, the participants signed a one-paragraph joint statement, which states:

“The Parties have agreed to continue meaningful discussions of concerns and issues raised by both

sides on June 14 and 15, 2012 in Oslo, to pave the way for the resumption of the formal talks in the peace negotiations in order to resolve the armed conflict and attain a just and lasting peace.”

What did each side say to the other?

The NDFP team raised the following six concerns and issues, stressing that GPH compliance with these would open the way to resuming the formal negotiations on socio-economic reforms and convening the JMC:

1. Respect and comply with all bilateral agreements without qualification. Elaboration or amendments to these must be by mutual agreement.
2. Release all 356 political prisoners in accordance with the CARHRIHL and the Hernandez political offense doctrine (upheld several times by the Supreme Court).
3. Respect and comply with the JASIG by releasing 14 detained NDFP consultants and JASIG-protected personnel; conducting independent investigations on the extrajudicial killing of Sotero Llamas and the enforced disappearances of Leo Velasco, Prudencio Calubid, Rogelio Calubad and other NDFP consultants, family members and staff; and acknowledging GPH responsibility for “instigating” the raids on the NDFP office and the homes of Sison and NDFP personnel in August 2007.
4. Reconstruct the documents-of-identification list of NDFP consultants and staff, using encrypted photos.
5. Rectify the “terrorist listing” of the CPP, NPA and Sison by the US and other foreign governments.
6. Indemnify the victims of human rights violations under the Marcos regime as provided for in the CARHRIHL.

The GPH team, according to an OPAPP online posting, raised the following issues and concerns: 1) a ceasefire, or at least the “lowering of the level of violence,” especially against civilians and business establishments; and 2) objection to the NPA’s use of landmines in violation of the CARHRIHL.

No meeting of minds there.

But beyond this problem is the glaring absence of P-Noy’s intervention. He hasn’t even spoken up. Unlike Ramos, who showed political will to overcome deadlocks and kept the negotiations moving forward.

Amid these uncertainties, amid talk suspensions and talk revivals that only bog down again, what can the mainstream media latch on to for sustained peace reporting? It would seem, again, that the focus is on clashes, particularly in the countryside.

A 2012 *Philippine Star* year-ender report, “Peace talks with NPA hit rough patch”, provided a good summary of where things stood between the parties, but was still oriented towards reporting conflict on the ground.

The report is also anchored in the significant developments between the GPH and the MILF, who in October that year signed a framework agreement for the establishment of Bangsamoro.

The first part of the report reads:

While the administration is gaining headway in peace efforts with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), lawyer Alexander Padilla’s progress in peace overtures with the Communist Party of the Philippines-National Democratic Front (CPP-NDF) are not as encouraging.

The peace process that the administration pushed under the leadership of former government peace panel chairman (now Supreme Court Associate Justice) Marvic Leonen in dealing with the MILF has overshadowed the government’s peace negotiations with the communists.

Leonen’s group inked a framework agreement with the MILF peace panel headed by Mohagher Iqbal during a ceremony at Malacañang on Oct. 15.

The framework agreement will pave the way for the establishment of a Bangsamoro political entity for Muslims in Mindanao.

On the other hand, the peace negotiations between the government and the CPP-NDF have bogged down.

While the government and the MILF have expressed trust in each other's peace panels, the government and the NDF peace panels have accused each other of failing to show sincerity and implement confidence-building measures to persuade one another to go back to the negotiating table.

The New People's Army (NPA) has continuously staged attacks on military camps and installations in Mindanao.

It has also raided mining firms in Mindanao, resulting not only in damage to property, but to the death of many innocent civilians and soldiers.

One of the significant incidents that ripped the possibility of the government and NDF returning to the negotiating table was the NPA grenade attack in Paquibato District in Davao City that injured 47 persons, mostly children.

The government's committee monitoring the peace negotiations with the NDF has asked the NPA to show goodwill and surrender members allegedly behind the grenade attack in August this year.

The following year, GPH Panel Chair Padilla, in a report posted on the OPAPP website, said that in light of the talks going "nowhere for the last 27 years", the Aquino administration is considering a "new approach" to resolve the armed conflict with the CPP-NPA-NDF peacefully. He is quoted in the report as saying:

We cannot wait forever for the other side if they continually refuse to go back to the negotiating table without preconditions."

The government will be taking a new approach to pursue peace.

We are always open to peace negotiations. But the other side has to do better than present endless roadblocks to formal talks. We need to see sincerity and political will on their part to seek peaceful ways to build consensus between them, the government and the whole of society and put an end to the senseless violence they are inflicting on our people especially on innocent civilians.

In a separate report also posted on the OPAPP website, Secretary Deles was indirectly quoted as saying "the new approach will factor the inputs of different stakeholder

groups from nationwide consultations conducted by the GPH panel".

She was also indirectly quoted as referring to the "the concept of 'peace zones' in Sagada in the Cordillera and Tulumun in North Cotabato as examples of how the people themselves can be instrumental in promoting peace in their communities".

Peace talks would be revived again with the Sison announcement in December 2014.

And despite the underreporting of this issue, efforts were made by the mainstream media – to their credit – to provide context and to show where exactly the GPH and CPP-NPA-NDF stood in their peace negotiations.

Inquirer Research, using the paper's archives and the OPAPP website as sources, published the following context piece entitled "What went before: peace talks between government and communist rebels" alongside the December 27th report entitled "Joma says peace talks may resume next year":

Peace talks between the government and communist rebels have been on and off for nearly three decades, with negotiations getting suspended several times.

In May, Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) founding chair Jose Ma. Sison said he "remained willing" to meet with President Benigno Aquino III to help jump-start the stalled peace talks despite the arrest of alleged top CPP leaders Benito Tiamzon and his wife, Wilma Austria, in March.

Sison made the remarks via Skype at a forum in Hong Kong, which was attended by an audience of mostly domestic workers. At the time, Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Teresita Deles said "any serious proposal toward resuming peace talks should be coursed through our third-party facilitator and not through the media."

Broker

Deles was referring to Norway, which is brokering the peace negotiations between the government and the communist-led National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP).

It was the second time that Sison spoke about his willingness to meet with Mr. Aquino to revive peace talks with the communist insurgents, following the

administration's successful peace negotiations with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The government and the MILF signed a peace agreement in March, ending more than four decades of conflict.

In July, the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the CPP, released four policemen who were captured when the insurgents raided the Alegria municipal hall in Surigao del Norte province.

Malacañang said the release was a welcome development. Presidential spokesperson Edwin Lacierda said: "We hope this is a groundbreaking event where the NDF-CPP-NPA would look forward to pursuing the peace process without any conditions. We have always stated government is ready to sit down with them. We are hopeful the peace table would move forward with respect to the left."

Calls to resume talks

On April 1, Luis Jalandoni, chair of the peace panel of the NDFP, said the communist insurgents had long been calling for the resumption of peace talks, contrary to statements attributed to government peace negotiator Alex Padilla that the rebels revived calls for a return to the negotiating table only after the arrest of Tiamzon and Austria.

Jalandoni, in an e-mail statement, said he and Padilla met on Feb. 27 and Padilla at that time knew that the insurgents had wanted to resume the talks. The Tiamzons and five other alleged members of the CPP Central Committee were arrested three weeks later in Carcar City, south of Cebu City.

The insurgents' recent call for the resumption of peace talks was a reversal of their statement in December last year. On its 45th anniversary, the CPP declared it would no longer pursue negotiations because of the Aquino administration's 'unwillingness to negotiate a just peace.'

"It has no choice but to wait for the next regime to engage in serious negotiations," the CPP said.

Despite the party's declaration that it would not be returning to the negotiating table during the Aquino administration, the government said that it remained committed to forging peace with the communist insurgents.

Talks "killed"

According to Sison, it was the administration that decided to terminate peace negotiations, but Deles said it was the NDFP, the political arm of the CPP, that "killed" the talks because of its insistence on preconditions before negotiations could resume.

In February 2011, the two parties met in Norway but failed to reach a settlement, particularly on such issues as the release of detained communist insurgents and the declaration of a longer ceasefire. The peace process has not moved since then.

In October 2010, the Aquino administration expressed desire to revive the negotiations with the formation of a new panel to talk with the NDFP and the NPA.

During the presidency of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, the peace talks also broke down.

In June 2001, the government unilaterally suspended the negotiations to protest the assassination, allegedly by the NPA, of Cagayan Rep. Rodolfo Aguinaldo and Quezon Rep. Marcial Punzalan.

In 2002, then Army spokesperson Lt. Col. José Mabanta said a faction led by Tiamzon, who then headed the NPA, opposed peace talks with the government, adding that the leadership struggle was blocking the resumption of peace talks.

List of "terrorists"

In 2004, negotiations were scuttled anew with the NDFP accusing the Arroyo administration of "sabotaging" the talks by pressing for the insurgents' surrender upon the signing of a final peace agreement.

Jalandoni said in a 2005 interview that the government wanted the NDFP to sign a "prolonged ceasefire" before the talks resumed, as well as a final peace agreement that would mean the surrender of the NPA.

He accused the government of being behind the listing of the NDFP as a terrorist group by the United States and the European Union in 2002, and of using the terrorist tag to force it to sign the agreement.

Jalandoni said the NDFP would rather wait for a new administration than resume talks with the "crumbling" Arroyo administration.

All-out war

In June 2006, then President Arroyo declared an all-out war on the communist rebels and set aside P1 billion for the military and the police to crush the insurgency.

In early 2007, Jalandoni said Norway was again willing to host exploratory peace talks in Oslo, but the Philippine government insisted that the NDFP first agree to a ceasefire before talks could resume.

In July that year, both Jalandoni and Sison rejected a proposal for a three-year ceasefire as a condition for resuming the talks. This aimed to “crush” the communist insurgency without dealing with the roots of the conflict, they said.

Sison said formal talks could resume only after the government did the following: stop extrajudicial killings, abductions, tortures, mass displacement of people and other human rights violations; stop the terrorist blacklisting of the CPP, NDFP and the NPA; and indemnify victims of human rights abuses during the Marcos regime.

In 2008, the government negotiating panel asked the NDFP to agree to a ceasefire as a condition but was rejected anew. The NDFP feared that as soon as it approved a prolonged ceasefire, the Arroyo administration would deem all previously signed agreements superseded, and surrender negotiations would take the place of substantive talks on basic reforms.

The *Philippine Star*, meanwhile, published the following 2014 year-ender report: “Peace talks between gov’t, reds remain elusive”, although the orientation, like its 2012 year-ender, is negative and alternates between discussions of the talks and conflict in the field:

Manila, Philippines – Peace with the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its armed wing New People’s Army (NPA) and political umbrella National Democratic Front (NDF) has remained elusive for President Aquino’s four-year-old administration.

Despite recent developments that gave some encouraging signs, there is no clear indication that the suspended peace talks between the government and the CPP will ever push through before Aquino steps down in 2016.

The negotiations between the government and the CPP broke down in February 2013. The government cited lack of sincerity and political will on the part of the CPP.

While expressing readiness to resume the peace talks, Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process Teresita Quintos-Deles said that the resumption of the peace talks should be on the basis of “doable and time-bound agenda.”

CPP founding Chairman Jose Ma. Sison said the government and the CPP may return to the negotiating table on the second week of January after the visit of Pope Francis.

Sison noted that a comprehensive agreement on economic reforms, truce and cooperation could still be accomplished before Aquino finishes his term should the government and the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) be fair in the negotiation.

But Deles said that while “friends of the peace process have been shuttling between the two panels to explore possible parameters for restarting talks at the earliest time possible,” there have been “no meetings between the government and the NDF to discuss the possible resumption of talks.”

“So far, feedback has been positive but there remain matters to be clarified in order to ensure that, if ever we do resume talks, it will not go the same way of an early, major impasse that has happened too often in the past,” she added.

Deles also said that in keeping with the spirit and hope of the Christmas season, she would like to think that Sison’s very positive remark indicates that common ground between the two parties may indeed be broadened towards the achievement of a just and durable peace that the Filipino people desire and deserve.

For his part, government peace panel chairman Alexander Padilla asked the CPP to transcend ideological boundaries and respond positively to the people’s yearning for peace.

Padilla noted that history has shown that it is through earnest dialogue, not armed violence, that peace is created.

“We have asked them to engage in talks that have a clear agenda and timetable, to talk not just for the sake of talking, but to reach specific agreements that will lessen if not eradicate the violence on the ground,” Deles added.

The NPA showed a goodwill gesture to promote the peace negotiations with the release of its captive personnel of the Philippine National Police (PNP) last July 30 after days of intense negotiations initiated by NDF-Mindanao spokesman Jorge Madlos.

The policemen were picked up in a mountainous barangay in Agusan del Norte by a group of multi-religious leaders who served as third party negotiators for the release of the captives.

The NPA had abducted four policemen when they attacked a police outpost in a remote area in Surigao del Norte earlier this year.

For the purpose of the release, the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the NPA agreed to separately issue a Suspension of Military Offensives (SOMO) to their respective forces for a period of five days from July 27 to Aug. 1.

Deles said the outburst of intense relief and joy at the reunion of the freed police officers with their families, all with very young children, was the immediate and heartfelt reward for everyone’s efforts.

In releasing the captive policemen, the NPA announced that they had taken this action as a goodwill gesture.

“We welcome this message from the NPA. In the face of the difficult challenges that have confronted this particular peace table, the government has remained firm in its commitment to pursue a peaceful resolution to this long drawn-out armed conflict,” Deles said.

However, Padilla questioned the CPP’s sincerity because its call for the resumption of peace talks was made only through media and not through the proper channels.

He said the proper approach would have been for the CPP to inform the Norwegian government, the third party facilitator of the peace negotiations since 2004. But “there has been no formal notification to the government up until today.”

However, the arrest of NDF leaders Benito and Wilma Tiamzon on March 22 also added to the question of sincerity, this time on the part of the government.

NDF leaders Randall Echanis and Rafael Baylosis complained they were prohibited from visiting the Tiamzon couple at the PNP Custodial Center.

The government denied the allegations. Padilla explained that the PNP duty officer that day clarified that as a matter of standard operating procedure, they need at least one week to process requests for visits.

He noted that while visits are given the highest priority for immediate relatives, counsels and doctors, all others who do not fall under these categories have to undergo the usual scrutiny and process, which require an application submitted days in advance.

“Echanis and Baylosis handed their request letter signed by SELDA only on the day of their visit. In light of this, the PNP regretfully informed Echanis and Baylosis that they could not favorably grant the request and they were advised to reschedule their visit,” he said.

A month before the Tiamzon couple were arrested, NDF consultant Ramon Patriarca was released from jail, following the decision of the Danao City regional trial court in Cebu to dismiss the case against him.

Patriarca was arrested in February 2009 by joint elements of the police and the 78th Infantry Battalion in Barangay Casili, Consolacion town in Northern Cebu. He was charged with rebellion.

But the NDF maintained that Patriarca was one of its consultants in the peace negotiation.

These two pieces by the *Inquirer* and *Star* help their readers situate what were then current developments in the broader context of the lengthy peace negotiations that for decades have not been fruitful. They also reveal how prospects for peace, despite decades of the GPH and the CPP-NPA-NDF trying to negotiate and despite many instances of what seemed to be positive developments, remain out of reach.

Recommendations

Because the media play a crucial role in nation-building (and with that, in prospects for peace), practitioners from newsrooms, down to individual reporters, need to be

informed fully on all significant aspects of the negotiations between the GPH and the CPP-NPA-NDF.

Building the capacities of members of the media to do exactly this is, however, easier said than done. The reporting on Bangsamoro developments, which have been covered more extensively by the mainstream media, remains problematic in some areas.

For example, the aftermath of the January 25th incident in Mamasapano, Maguindanao, in which 44 members of the Special Action Force of the Philippine National Police and 18 members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front were killed would appear to have resulted in more conflict than peace reporting in the mainstream media. What more about the peace talks between the GPH and the CPP-NPA-NDF, where other than official statements from both sides, no significant developments have been seen? It should be noted that the Mamasapano incident also negatively affected prospects for peace between the GPH and the CPP-NPA-NDF.

A recent April 2015 report on *TV Patrol* featured an interview with NDF Peace Panel Chair Luis Jalandoni asking the government to also give attention to the CPP-NPA-NDF problem instead of just the Bangsamoro. OPAPP Sec. Deles was quoted in the same report explaining that trust in the peace talks must first be restored, especially after Mamasapano.

Again, the topic of the report was ostensibly peace, but the treatment was conflict, i.e. Jalandoni and Deles trading barbs. A crucial quote from the former was also about the significant size of the NPA in terms of members and ammunition supplies. And despite new developments, covering the CPP-NPA-NDF as one would a crime was evident in a *24 Oras* report on the same month about two alleged members of the CPP caught on CCTV trying to extort money. In the report, no mention was made of the peace process. Instead, there was a note towards the end saying that the CPP had not given its side of the story yet.

How then to improve the reporting on the CPP-NPA-NDF?

Since sources are crucial for journalists, the OPAPP as the lead government agency that handles peace negotiations should for start by updating its website, particularly the section about the CPP-NPA-NDF peace table. A cursory check on the OPAPP website would show that the “Highlights of the GPH-NDF peace negotiations” page was last updated on May 31st 2011. A separate “Updates on the GPH-CPP/NPA/NDF peace negotiations” page

carries the same out-of-date posting date. In contrast, developments on the Bangsamoro are banner stories, and have many available related resources.

Had OPAPP updated its pages on the CPP-NPA-NDF, it would have been probable that a resourceful journalist might have provided more information to his/her readers or viewers.

Further studies on the CPP-NPA-NDF must also be encouraged and resources provided reflecting the views and positions of third parties involved in the peace negotiations. The results of this scholarship would not only be useful to the Philippine mainstream media, but may well contribute significantly to peace negotiations that until now have never translated themselves into the lives of ordinary Filipinos.

Appendix C: Interviews with key informants

(Government peace negotiators, media executives, journalists, a CNN negotiator and a leftist congressman)

1. Interview with Atty. Jess Dureza, April 23rd 2015, Country Club, Greenhills

Background of interviewee

- Community journalist with Davao’s oldest community newspaper, the *Mindanao Times*. Became a lawyer, passed the bar and went into politics.
- Elected congressman in 1987, appointed by Speaker Ramon Mitra as representative of the House to the peace negotiating panel during President Fidel V. Ramos’ tenure.
- The head of the negotiating panel at the time was Ambassador Howard Dee. Formal negotiations took place from 1987 to the 1990s.
- In 2006 Dureza became press secretary and head of OPAPP.
- Dureza was a congressman (circa 1989) during President Cory Aquino’s tenure when Speaker Monching Mitra appointed him House representative to the GPH peace negotiating panel with the CNN.
- The chair then was former envoy to the Vatican Ambassador Howard Dee. Dureza was designated as GPH panel spokesman and joined the peace talks in Europe with Joma, Louie Jalandoni, Fidel Agcaoili et al. across the table.
- During Ramos’s presidency, Dureza served as presidential assistant for Mindanao and chair of the Mindanao Economic Development Council (MEDCO). Starting with the Arroyo presidency, in 2001 he was

appointed as chair of the government panel for peace negotiations with the MILF.

- In 2006, when the Hyatt 10 resigned, including OPAPP's Ging Deles, she appointed Dureza to OPAPP to oversee negotiations with the MILF and CNN and implement the 1996 MNLF peace agreement. In 2008 Dureza left OPAPP to become press secretary.

Opinions and perceptions

- Early negotiations started with the Hague Declaration, which came up with list of agreements, but no ceasefire.
- The Hague Declaration also listed the names of NDF consultants to be given exemption from arrest; this list was kept in a bank vault.
- The NDF used the list to free any of its members caught by the military merely by claiming that their names were already included in the list.
- The NDF tactic was to continue with peace negotiations, but never agree to a ceasefire in order to prevent the revolutionary movement from stagnating.
- During the time of President Marcos, the government negotiated peace with the MNLF through the Southern Philippines Development Authority (SPDA).
- Dureza endorses a ceasefire and the resumption of peace talks with the CNN.
- He does not believe that media owners try to influence coverage of the peace process.
- But he says Mindanao journalists complain of Manila desk bias, which tries to generalise stories to the whole of Mindanao as if the whole island is a war zone.
- When he was head of OPAPP he tried to conduct dialogues with Manila desk editors and community journalists about peace reporting, stressing the need to be more accurate and to promote peace.
- Military sources are understandably biased against the rebels.
- Media owners would only interfere in peace process coverage if it affects politics and advertising.
- Big business owners want peace.
- Dureza believes the mass media have very great influence over public opinion and the peace process.
- But there is very little coverage of the peace process.
- Dureza said there is a lack of backgrounding or contextual coverage of the peace process.

Some points regarding media reporting and the CNN

1. "Peace reporting or the covering of peace negotiations is a specialised field. Reporters must have deep background knowledge of the peace process so that stories are not treated like ordinary events, given that there is great sensitivity to context, accuracy, precision

of language, etc. A blaring headline can disrupt what is otherwise a positive development in the talks. The rule is: negotiations should take place behind closed doors and not via the media. Contentious issues between panels are best discussed in executive sessions rather than in the public domain.

"During my time, we continued to give media briefings, backgrounders and developed a regular pool of media reporters who have some understanding of the nuances of peace negotiations developments, given that prudence (not big headlines, sensational lead paragraphs) and accuracy in press reports help nurture the process.

"In fact, joint statements or communiqués jointly issued by both sides are standard. (Behind the scene, panels debate over words, even where to place the commas, in preparing these joint statements before they are released.)

"I used to call newspaper editors to assign specific reporters to cover the peace negotiations and not just anyone to jump in at any time.

"But when peace talks are off or suspended or a breakdown takes place, the bets are off. (As what we are witnessing today in the media exchanges between the GPH and CNN.)

2. "Media can play an important role in providing an enabling environment for the resumption of talks. One way of doing this is to hold interviews and write stories based on statements from sectors supportive of the resumption of talks. These sectors, as talking heads, must come from the mainstream and NOT those identified with the Left, to gain traction, e.g. heads of the business sector or chambers of commerce, etc.

"Periodic background materials or statements must also be fed to known newspaper desks and columnists to ensure that the issue of peace talks is not forgotten, or just to maintain public interest in the matter.

3. "A basic consideration is to create an enabling environment for peace talks to be held. A 'public clamour' must be generated, otherwise government will take the initiative.
4. "Third-party interlocutors (like Norway) must start shuttling between Manila and Utrecht to revive interest, and these efforts must be reported by the media,

although in very subdued tones, just to nurture public attention and keep the flame burning. If possible, Joma et al. should be advised to tone down their attacks on OPAPP, etc.”

2. Interview with Atty. Efren Moncupa, April 22nd 2015, at the Moncupa Law Office

Background of interviewee

- Atty. Efren Moncupa was a FLAG lawyer during the martial law period and represented anti-martial law activists, together with Diokno, Joker Arroyo and Alex Padilla. When Atty. Alex Padilla was appointed head of the panel to negotiate with the communists, Moncupa was invited to join the panel.

Opinion on peace process

- Negotiations with the CPP-NPA-NDF (CNN) reached an impasse in 2010 during President Arroyo’s administration. Pablo Sanidad was head of the panel at the time.
- After P-Noy took over and appointed Alex Padilla to head the panel, with the following members: Efren Moncupa and Jurgette Honculada.
- The CNN panel included Joma Sison, Luis Jalandoni, Connie Ledesma, Fidel Agcaoili and Juliet Delima.
- From 2011 to 2013 they held non-meetings and issued non-papers (this is the way they described the informal negotiations going on in Norway and the Netherlands, where Joma and Sison lived in exile).
- Common issues that stalled negotiations involved the release of political prisoners who were supposed to be consultants for the CNN. The CNN called them political prisoners while the Philippine government called them public order violators.
- The names of the consultants were supposed to be locked up at the start of negotiations in a bank vault in Utrecht in the Netherlands. When high-ranking CNN operatives were arrested, CNN would claim they were consultants.
- The Philippine government would demand that the bank vault be opened to see if their names were indeed on the list, to be sure that the CNN was not just adding names to the list from time to time.
- If they were on the list, the government panel would promise its “best efforts to release them”, which the CNN would interpret as “promise to release”.
- After talks collapsed in the last part of President Arroyo’s administration, they were revived by P-Noy when he took over. A preliminary agreement was signed in March 2011. Talks reached another impasse in 2011 to 2013.

Opinion regarding coverage of the peace process

- There is no public opinion on the peace process.
- Big business owners want peace.
- There is very little media coverage of the peace process and no backgrounding coverage.
- There is no desire from the public for peace negotiations to resume.
- Therefore there is a need to upgrade public opinion regarding the peace process and bring it to the fore. We must drum up public awareness of the peace process and campaign for public awareness.
- There is a need for a peace settlement, but we need to restart the peace process. We should develop a communications plan to revive public awareness of the need to resume negotiations.

3. Interview with Nilo Paurom, chief, *Inquirer* Page One operations, May 7th 2015, QC

Professional background

- Silliman student 1971-75; in Manila since 1977.
- Series of odd writing-editing jobs, as all-around writer-editor of various publications, e.g. *Makati Trade Journal*; *National Dispatch*; trade, tourism and management magazines.
- Joined the *Inquirer* in 1986 as city editor through his friend Roy Acosta, who was *Inquirer* editor at the time. Hung out at National Press Club with drinking buddies, including Acosta. Became assistant news editor, 1991-98, and Page One editor, 1999-present.
- Coverage of peace process – no experience on this beat. The *Inquirer* has no dedicated peace beat reporter. Usually senior reporters covering defence, foreign affairs and Malacañang are assigned to cover peace or conflict reporting.

Opinions and perceptions

- The *Inquirer*’s regular sources of news about the peace process are press releases as a starting point, leading to a follow-up process. Websites of the NDF, military spokespersons, government sources, spot news starts investigations on the ground; generally developments start from spot news.
- Media owners and management come into the process only to stress that big, controversial stories are balanced, not libelous; that they should not affect advertising; and that reporters should get the views of politicians mentioned in controversial stories.
- A few reporters and deskmen are activists and have political leanings, but editors are aware of this and make sure that their stories are balanced.

On coverage of the peace process: the *Inquirer* is openly for the peace process and supports the BBL

- On the extent of peace process coverage: very extensive on the MILF and supports the BBL.
- On peace process coverage of the CNN: little so far; waiting for concrete moves towards peace negotiations.
- On the treatment of news/opinion on the peace process: the aim is to be objective. On the type of coverage: half spot news, half backgrounding through the research department and senior news desk editors.
- Orientation of coverage is positive. There are *Inquirer* bureaus in Cebu, Davao, Legaspi, Angeles City and Baguio.

Inquirer editorial planning and decision-making process

- Stories are sourced to reporters who write the first draft.
- Desk editors then check the copy.
- It is then sent to the senior editors – Artemio Engracia, Joey Nolasco and Nilo Paurom.
- At 3 p.m. there is a news conference that includes the news desk and the copy editors who edit copy for the following day's edition.

4. Interview with Marichu Villanueva, May 1st 2015, *Philippine Star* office

Professional background

- Associate editor, *Philippine Star*.
- Former *Manila Standard* staff member.
- Joined *Philippine Star* in 2005 as news editor.
- Malacañang reporter.
- Covered the peace process as the Malacañang reporter.
- Claims the *Philippine Star* is the Philippine newspaper with the widest readership, most advertisers and highest income. It is the largest taxpayer among the country's newspapers.
- The *Philippine Star* reporters covering the peace process are those assigned to the Malacañang (political) beat and OPAPP.

Facts, opinions and perceptions

- Regular sources of news on the peace process comprise press releases, government spokespersons, military (DND) spokespersons, documents, emails and websites.
- News values that determine coverage are essentially conflict and spot news, like NPA attacks, kidnappings, raids, encounters and arrests. There is no attempt at background reporting.

- Official announcements at press conferences and official statements also determine coverage.

Perceptions on whether and how media owners try to influence the editorial process and coverage of peace negotiations – none.

Perceptions on how political leanings of news desk influence the editorial press in the coverage of the peace negotiations – one or two reporters may have political leanings, but the editors decide what to use and how to present their stories. They always demand balance achieved by interviewing the other side.

Perceptions on the Star's coverage of the peace process – extensive, objective (as a matter of policy), 80% spot news and 20% backgrounding.

The orientation of coverage is neutral, i.e. objective.

Views on editorial planning – no regular planning; they approach the day with a blank slate. Coverage is day to day: whatever happens is covered. Since there are no formal peace talks, there is no coverage of the peace process. Editors decide on the content of the paper, based on what is happening. The owners do not meddle with the contents of the paper, as long as it makes money. It makes money because the contents are readable and appeal to readers. The market for the most part determines content.

The owners do not interfere with the running of the paper. The editors know when their stories will affect big advertisers and therefore take care not to antagonise them.

Opinion regarding the spate of killings by riders on motor-bikes – these hired guns are the former "sparrows" of the NPA earning money for their organisation. The military does not want to acknowledge them as communist killers to avoid glamourising them.

5. Interview with Howie Severino, April 27th 2015, GMA office

Education

- Ateneo de Manila Grade School and High School.
- Tufts University, BA in History (1983), *magna cum laude*.
- Sussex University, MA in Environment, Development and Policy (1993).

Professional experience

- Writer, Philippines Embassy, Washington DC, 1983.
- Teacher, Ateneo de Manila High School (1984–86).
- Executive assistant of Health Secretary Alfredo Bengzon, Department of Health (1986–88).
- Reporter, *Manila Chronicle* (1988–91).
- Staff, PCIJ (1991–1997).
- Reporter, The Probe Team (1997–2001).
- Documentarist, *I-Witness* (2002–present).
- Editor-in-chief, *GMA News Online* (2009–14).
- Vice president, news and public affairs, GMA Network (2009–present).

Opinion on the GPH-CNN peace process – the peace process is “invisible”; nothing is going on worth reporting. The CNN has just not been in the news until very recently, when Luis Jalandoni and his wife Connie Ledesma held interviews with the media.

Joma Sison is no longer a significant factor in the CNN. He is no longer seen as a significant force to reckon with and has lost control over the CNN.

GMA coverage of the GPH peace process with MILF, on a scale of 1 to 5 – very extensive.

On the GPH peace process with the CNN, on a scale of 1 to 5 – very little

On the GMA’s treatment of news – objective, as opposed to sensational

Type of coverage – spot news oriented; very little contextual reporting. TV puts a premium on spot news. Contextual writing follows when significant spot news is happening.

Perception of the GMA’s influence on public opinion – very great. But with little GMA coverage of the peace process, very little.

Orientation of GMA coverage of the peace process – positive, as opposed to negative or neutral.

Editorial planning and news decision-making process – at daily meetings the news anchor reviews the previous newscast and identifies mistakes made, if any. The team reviews news stories and news scripts. It then plans the next day’s newscast.

Decisions on coverage of news – decisions on what to cover and how are made by the executive producer, programme manager and news anchor.

GMA has a MILF-beat reporter as well as a defence-beat reporter.

The owners do not meddle with the news departments, e.g. what news to cover and how.

Perception of the factors that influence coverage – decisions on what to cover and how to cover the peace process are based on significance, news value, human interest and ratings.

Question: “Are any GMA news staff members of lobby groups or political parties?” Answer: “Not that I know of.”

Question: “Do owners have a say on GMA news coverage, particularly of the peace process?” Answer: “They can influence news coverage of the peace process if they wish (since they are owners), but they do not (or I have not heard of any instance that they have).”

6. Interview with Satur Ocampo, May 7th 2015, Fisher Mall, QC

Media background

- Reporter, *Manila Times, Philippine News and Features* and *Sun Star Manila*. During martial law, Ocampo went underground, was captured, and was imprisoned from 1976 to 1985. Escaped in 1985 and surfaced after the 1986 People Power Revolution.
- Founder, National Democratic Front and chief, CNN panel of negotiators in talks with the Cory Aquino government in 1986–87.
- Founded the NDF, which put under one umbrella all activist organisations like the KM, Anakbayan, the KMU, etc.

After People Power 1986, the Cory Aquino government and the CNN agreed on December 10th 1986 to a 60-day ceasefire and to start peace negotiations. NDF chief Satur Ocampo was chair of the CNN panel to the peace negotiations. Members were Antonio Zumel and Bobby Malay.

The government panel was chaired by Jose Diokno. Members were Ramon Mitra, Tito Guingona and Jayme Guerrero. When Sen. Diokno fell sick with cancer, his daughter, Maris Diokno, took his place. The peace talks were then held at the old Commission on Audit building on Commonwealth Avenue.

The negotiations were suspended after the Mendiola massacre in January 1987, when seven farmers were shot by soldiers guarding the Mendiola Road leading to Malacañang. At that time the military was opposed to the Cory Aquino government's decision to engage the CNN in peace talks.

The peace talks were suspended during the Cory Aquino administration. President Ramos resumed the negotiations during his administration.

Ocampo is president of Bayan Muna and has served three three-year terms in Congress. He was followed by Teddy Casino, who served three three-year terms. The present Bayan Muna representative is Neri Colmenares, who is starting his first term.

Perceptions on the media's regular sources of news about the peace process – phone numbers and websites of the NDF in Utrecht and the Philippines; phone numbers and websites of the OPAPP chair and members; press releases and spokespersons.

Views on media reporting of the peace process – suggests that the media appoint regular and designated peace-beat reporters. The media should make it a policy to promote peace.

Satur Ocampo and the NDF note that there are people in media who have political leanings to the left.

Ocampo thinks that the media at present have little influence on the peace process and contains enough coverage of the peace process.

As to the media treatment of peace process coverage, it is subjective, especially recently because of the Mamasapano incident.

As to the type of coverage, Ocampo thinks that media peace process coverage is 70% spot news and 30% backgrounding.

As to the media's orientation, some positive, some neutral and some negative. The media also exaggerates in some situations.

History of the GPH-CNN negotiations

- The Hague Declaration of 1992 under the Ramos administration was the mother declaration, one of ten major agreements.
- This was followed by the JASIG accord (Joint Agree-

ment on Security and Immunity Guarantees)

- Then came the CAHRIL (Comprehensive Agreement on Human Rights and International Law).
- Then came the Agreement on Social and Economic Reforms.

Views on peace process

- The government should resume negotiations with the CNN immediately, although he believes that Deles is controlled by the military, which has defined its policy as "to reduce the CNN to irrelevance".
- The government cannot use the excuse that it has its hands full with the MILF problem, because the peace negotiators with the CNN would be a different panel and tackle separate issues.
- What can be done to jumpstart the peace process with the CNN?
- Peace advocacy groups can lead the way, e.g. church groups like the UCCP and Catholic Church, or the Philippine Ecumenical Peace Forum.
- The negotiators should break the deadlock on the interpretation of the JASIG and take up the church offer to provide sanctuary for NDF consultants released for the peace process.
- The mass media can lead public opinion to put pressure on the government to resume peace negotiations.

Views on P-Noy and the prospects for peace talks

Ocampo suggested two reasons for why P-Noy's February 2011 initiative to resume peace talks with the CNN failed:

1. P-Noy's declared pursuit of the mantra of his mother (Cory Aquino), i.e. to address the root causes of the armed conflict, lacked his promised "clear policies to pave the way ahead" (In Ocampo's December 11th 2010 piece entitled "Let's hope optimism lasts on GPH-NDFP peace talks" he warned that without such clear policies the talks would likely not progress.)
2. Like his mother, P-Noy was not hands-on in managing the peace talks. He left it to his peace process adviser, Teresita Deles, to handle the task. Thus, rather than get his marching orders from the president, who was his principal, GPH panel head Alexander Padilla deferred to Deles as "my boss". He echoed her positions both on issues of procedures and substantial agenda.

Deles' ideological-political bias – or deep-seated antagonism towards the Left – dictated her moves. A few months before the February 2011 formal talks,

Deles had stated publicly that she wanted all the previously signed agreements reviewed. Thus, when the two panels proceeded to reaffirm the agreements – which had taken several years of on-and-off negotiations to complete – the GPH panel included several qualifications or reservations in its affirmation statements.

This laid the ground for the ensuing disputes and mutual accusations of insincerity, which in turn led to an impasse in the talks.

Nonetheless, certain factors have kept open the prospect of resuming the formal talks sometime soon:

- ✓ The Norwegian government’s sustained efforts as third-party facilitator to break the impasse. In 2012 and 2013 it sponsored and facilitated informal bilateral meetings to discuss a 2011 proposal for a truce and alliance the NDFP had directly addressed to President Aquino.
- ✓ Peace advocates similarly have been pressing both sides to go back to the negotiating table, address the root causes of the conflict, and honour all agreements. Notable initiatives came from the Philippine Ecumenical Peace Platform. And last year a broad grassroots peace movement called Kapayapaan pitched in.
- ✓ Late last year a group led by a former GPH panel member reportedly with strong Malacañang links and rapport with the NDFP started to broker a new accelerated timeline, with “doable” targets, for resuming the formal peace talks.

7. Interview with Teodoro “Teddy” Casino

Work experience

- Currently with BAYAN; was a partylist representative of Bayan Muna in the Philippine Congress from 2004 to 2013.
- Has spent years following the coverage of the peace process since 1986 (29 years). He has followed the peace process as a matter of interest. But in 2001 he was part of the Philippine delegation as a witness to the resumption of the peace process.
- Considers himself more of a third-party peace advocate: the peace process is a way of pushing for the people’s political agenda. Secondarily he sees himself as a media practitioner: he did a segment for the *Correspondents* on ABS-CBN.
- Links to ideological groups/parties: as a member of BAYAN, which is a democratic, activist organisation, he is on the left of the political spectrum.

Perceptions

The media’s most common news source – basically the media rely on government and are “government-centric.” More like 70%-30% in favour of the government: the 30% is shared among other stakeholders.

The importance and role of the mass media – the media are crucial. The peace process should involve the public, not just the NDF and government. Everybody has a stake in the peace process, even if they are not part of the armed struggle.

Perception on media owners and the peace process – in general, the peace process is covered. The bias is bigger coverage of the “official narrative” of the government side in the peace process. It is more often quoted and given importance. In general, corporate interest is not sympathetic to the agenda of the NDF. There is a natural tendency to play up the government side.

Perception on the political leanings of news desk influence – most people on the news desks are not sympathetic to the leftists. The mainstream media are part of the status quo. But because of certain journalistic principles, like balance and fairness, they give space to the NDF side.

Perception on coverage of the peace process – Question: “How would you describe the influence of the mass media in forming public opinion on the peace process?” Answer: “To a certain extent the media can sway public opinion. But the problem is that media coverage is not sustained and the peace process is also not sustained.

Perception on media influence on the peace process – very little. The dynamic of the peace process is for both parties to push for their constituents. Once there is agreement on an issue, the mass media play their role in disseminating information.

Perception on the treatment of news/opinion – the media try to be objective, but lack understanding of the dynamics of the peace process. For example, if the talks are suspended, they report that the NDF is demanding new things. They do not remember that these news issues are old issues, part of previous agreements. News media lack interpretation, they lack context. Media coverage is more spot news oriented and lacks backgrounding.

Perception on the orientation of media coverage – positive. In general, the coverage is positive, despite its limitations of lacking context and being pro-status quo. But the media are still keen on developments in the peace

process. Regarding adequate coverage, much more is needed to attract public opinion.

Opinion on the current political and economic situation in the country – it is important to resume the talks. The problem is that the government (through OPAPP) says it wants to attend to the BBL/MILF problem first because it is the wish of Malaysia and the US. It thinks that the CPP-NPA-NDF is already a spent force. The system hasn't really changed. It's the system that prevents things from happening. Change has to come from somewhere else.

Perception on news media coverage – in general, the reporting of conflict in the Philippine mass media is characteristic of traditional conflict reporting rather than peace reporting. Conflict reporting is characterised by the following:

- Reports mainly on the visible effects of war;
- Mainly elite-oriented;
- Focuses mainly on the differences that led to the conflict;
- Focuses mainly on the here and now;
- Sees the conflict in terms of a simply dichotomy between the good guys and the bad guys, victims and villains;
- Two-party orientation;
- Partisan; and

Adopts a zero-sum orientation.

Appendix D: the AIJC's role in peace communication and advocacy

For more than three decades the Asian Institute of Journalism and Communication (AIJC) has been involved in various peace communication initiatives through research, policy forums, training, communication planning, and information, education and communication (IEC) materials development.

In 1984, AIJC president emeritus Dr Florangel Rosario-Braid wrote "Communication, peace and international understanding in the Philippine context", which was published in *Philippine Studies of the Ateneo de Manila University*. In 1999 she wrote "The lessons of the Philippine peace process", which was included as chapter IX of the book, *Asian Peace: Security and Governance in the Asia Pacific Region*, which was edited by Dr Majid Tehranian and published in New York.

In 1993-94 the AIJC conducted the study Content Analysis of the Media Coverage of the Peace Process of the *Manila Bulletin* and *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. The findings were

eventually presented at the Roundtable Discussion on the Role of Media Reportage in the Peace Process, Unification and National Development, which was held in November 1994.

In 2002 the AIJC, with support from the Philippines National Commission for UNESCO (NatCom), conducted research and convened a series of forums on commonalities between Muslim and Christian Filipinos in such areas as community life, family life, political life, religion, education, environment and resource management, women, and laws. The end result was the publication of the pioneering book, *Muslim and Christian Cultures: In Search of Commonalities*.

The institute published *Media as a Battlefield: Coverage of the War in Iraq* in 2003. It consists of papers and proceedings of the forum Into the Battlefield: Media Coverage of the War in Iraq, which was convened by the AIJC about a month after the war broke out. The book examines lessons on media coverage of the war and advocates for the practice of peace journalism in the country.

From 2005 to 2006 the institute, with funding from the Asia Foundation, worked with the Philippine Judicial Academy of the Supreme Court to prepare the Communication Programme for Court-Annexed Mediation. This project produced a comprehensive communication plan to inform and educate the public on the advantages of using mediation in the courts. The project also produced IEC materials such as posters and brochures. News features on court-annexed mediation were written and published in national dailies and provincial newspapers.

In 2006-07 the AIJC implemented the Communication Project for the Code of Muslim Personal Laws (CMPL) and Shari'a Courts. Interviews and focus group discussions with shari'a judges and counsellors, Islamic religious leaders, lawyers, educators, and NGO and women leaders were conducted in key cities in Mindanao. The research results provided inputs to the process of designing a Comprehensive Communication and Advocacy Plan for CMPL. In addition, print IEC materials on the CMPL/shari'a courts were also developed, including three posters on using the shari'a courts (translated into Maguindanaon, Tausug, and Maranao) and primers on the Philippine shari'a courts and the CMPL.

Also in 2007, the AIJC produced two related research-cum-policy papers that examined the communication media's role in fomenting prejudice and pride or promoting tolerance regarding Muslim Filipinos. The papers

were commissioned by pagbabago@pilipinas. The first paper focused on the role of the news media, primarily newspapers, while the second paper was on Filipino movies.

The paper on news media illustrated the manifest and latent biases of newspapers in portraying the “Muslim” conflict and the way these biases contribute to further discrimination by one party against another. For the second study, seven films were selected for content analysis, namely, *Zamboanga* (1936), *Badjao* (1937), *Perlas ng Silangan* (1969), *Muslim Magnum.357* (1986), *Mistah: Mga Mandirigma* (1994), *The Sarah Balabagan Story* (1997), and *Bagong Buwan* (2000).

In December 2007 AIJC, together with the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) and other media partners, including the Philippine Press Institute and the Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas, convened two forums on peace journalism to lay the groundwork for the full implementation of the planned Fellows in Peace Journalism.

An Experts Forum was held on December 3rd 2007 to define the criteria for selection of the Fellows in Peace Journalism, their scope of responsibility, and the selection process. The second forum was a Roundtable Discussion-Workshop held on December 11th 2007 attended by editors and media executives to orient them on the concept and practice of “peace journalism”, activate support for the project, and finalise the criteria for the selection of the Fellows and their scope of responsibility. The implementation of the project was put on hold because of the change in leadership at OPAPP.

With UNESCO support, the AIJC developed and maintains the Website on Muslim Mindanao for Journalists and Other Communicators (www.muslimmindanao.ph). Launched in January 2009, the website responds to the expressed need of media practitioners for a knowledge resource on Muslim Mindanao. It specifically seeks to build the competence of print, broadcast or online journalists and other communicators covering or writing about Muslim affairs by enabling them to provide context and present broad and diverse perspectives on the issues and concerns of Muslim Filipinos and Muslim Mindanao – and in the process help build understanding and promote the peace process in the region.

In 2010 the AIJC introduced the Mindanao 2020 Communication for Development Plan for the Mindanao Peace and Development Framework Plan, 2010-2030 (Min2020).

This is the successor plan to Mindanao 2000, a 15-year plan prepared in the mid-1990s. Min2020 seeks to establish the shared vision among Mindanaons and build a consensus on the long-term, holistic and strategic road map towards lasting peace and a progressive and prosperous future for Mindanao.

To institutionalise this participatory process in development planning, the Min2020 planning team recognised the need to integrate a communication component into Min2020. But beyond facilitating participatory planning and building ownership, the Min2020 team also recognised that communication is an integral part of the process of pursuing and achieving most, if not all, of the development agenda and thrust of Min2020. Communication is recognised as a vital element in peacemaking, building social cohesion, facilitating the delivery of basic social services, and promoting a conducive business (entrepreneurial) environment, among others.

The Access to Justice by the Poor Project implemented from 2006 to 2007 was supported by the European Commission. Among its pilot areas were the provinces of Sultan Kudarat and Lanao del Norte in Mindanao. The AIJC was involved in improving the skills of newly appointed municipal court information officers (MCIOs) of pilot communities. The institute conducted an information needs assessment and training needs analysis using focus group discussions and interviews to determine learning areas for MCIOs, develop a training module/handbook, and eventually conduct a three-day trainers’ workshop. The AIJC also produced information and promotion materials on the rights of women and children, including flipchart and t-shirts.

In 2010 the AIJC was one of the six international partners of the UN Alliance of Civilisations (UNAOC) that convened the Third UN AOC Conference held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. AIJC president Ramon Tuazon also presented a paper entitled “Social impact of media and information literacy” during the event. **The UNAOC was established in 2005 and aims to improve understanding and cooperative relations among nations and peoples across cultures and religions.**

The AIJC maintains good relations with the Mindanao media. The majority of Mindanao-based daily and weekly newspapers participate in the Annual Community Press Awards of the Philippine Press Institute. The AIJC has served as the technical awards coordinator since the awards’ inception 14 years ago. It links with the broadcast media in Mindanao through the Kapisanan ng mga

Brodkaster sa Pilipinas (KBP) and its partners KBP in its annual Golden Dove Awards and various training programmes.

On August 3rd-6th 2011 a workshop on the **Use of ICT in Conflict and Post-conflict Areas among in-school and out-of-school children was organised by the AIJC** with support from UNESCO Office Jakarta and in cooperation with PECOJON and the National Computer Centre. This ICT training-cum-digital development project aimed to facilitate or broaden access to social media among the youth in a pilot community in Mindanao, to empower them to produce their own content that articulates their views on how peace can be attained, and to promote tolerance for the identity, culture, and way of life and aspirations of all the peoples of Mindanao.

Complementing the ICT for peace workshop was the Peace Journalism Workshop, which aimed at building the

professional capacity of Filipino journalists to practise peace journalism or conflict-sensitive journalism. It sought to impart knowledge and skills on peace journalism/ conflict-sensitive journalism to print and broadcast journalists based in the Zamboanga peninsula and the neighboring provinces of Basilan and Sulu. It was held on August 8th-10th 2011.

The AIJC has published the pioneering study *Crimes and Unpunishment: The Killing of Filipino Journalists (2012)*. With support from UNESCO, the study combines the input of the country's top social scientists to examine the phenomenon of the killing of journalists from the viewpoint of the scientists' respective disciplines: psychology, political science, political economy, communication, anthropology, history and law. Prior to the preparation of experts' papers, a series of regional dialogues with local social scientists, journalists and journalism educators were also held in 2009-10.

■ THE AUTHORS

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