



Costly Wars, Elusive Peace, **Miriam Coronel Ferrer, 2013**

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This book, *Costly Wars, Elusive Peace*, is a collection of articles written by the author Miriam Coronel Ferrer, which focuses on the Peace Processes in the Philippines between 1990 and 2007. It is divided into four (4) parts and each part consists of several articles, which the author had written and presented in different national and international forums pertinent to armed conflicts that had occurred in the Philippines.

The first part of the book is composed of different articles under the heading of “War Cost and Benefits.” The initial article discusses the nature and causes of armed conflict which looks into various dimensions—religious, economic, political, and cultural—aggravated by relative deprivation, loss of control of ancestral domains, human rights violation, militarization and marginalization. Protracted wars had put heavy toll on governments at opposing sectors, the reality the author says is “an illegitimate economic dimension of war, because of the tremendous costs on resources, disruption of economic life of the people and community, destruction of infrastructures, exploitation of natural resources not to mention its impact on the psychosocial state of some individuals due to the impact of violence and trauma.

In the article (included in Part I) “Philippine State and the Communist Insurgency,” the author, traces the history of the Communist movement in the Philippines and how this created conflicts in the different regions. In the same vein, the author discusses the history of Moro resistance, which started upon the birth of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the organization of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, a split-off from MNLF, and the ABU SAYAF, formerly commando fighters turned kidnappers of people for ransom. She further averred the current conflict in Mindanao was caused by complicated factors: poor governance, patronage and continuing underdevelopment, lack of national consensus, incoherent peace policy and absence of peace-building leadership and failure of ARMM as a mechanism for peaceful political competitor.

Part two of the book consists of three articles, which generally deal with the process of the Communist front. The first article written in 2008 delineates the peace negotiations between the Philippine government and the National Democratic Front (NDF). This included past negotiations between the Aquino administration (1987-1993) and the CPP-NPA-NDF and the GRP-NDF talks in 1997. In 1998, the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARPHIL), set forth the agenda and principles guiding the talks and uphold human rights. It prohibits all forms of violence against life and persons, inhumane and degrading treatment. Between 1986-1992, talks were conducted by the Aquino government and the CCP but failed due to irreconcilable framework. The author contended that the reasons for failure were multi-faceted and difficult to pin down one particular factor. However, doors re-open to peace due to more response to public opinion and growing public pressure. Consequently, peace zones were established in certain areas in Mindanao.

Part three consists of three articles, which pertain to “Instituting Regional Autonomy.” The article on “Breaking the Impasse: Formulae for Muslim Autonomy (1998) relates how the government under the Ramos administration (1992-1998) attempted to break the impasse through different proposed schemes—to find compromise agreement that will uphold both the provisions of the Tripoli Agreement (MNLF Perspective) and the Philippine constitutional processes. The second article written in 2000 entitled “Recycled Autonomy: Enacting the New Organic Act for a Regional autonomous government in Southern Philippines” examined the progress of the implementation of the legislative component of the latest peace agreement with MNLF and assessed the extent the proposed laws could provide meaningful autonomy as envisioned in the 1996 peace agreement. The third article, “Unfinished Regional Autonomy projects and the option” discusses the creation of two autonomous regions in Muslim Mindanao and Cordillera as provided by the 1987 Philippine Constitution.

The final part of the book (Part 4) deals with the theme “Elements of Peace Building,” which consists of five articles that dwell on the initiatives of varied agencies-government, NGOs, academe, religious institutions, and even foreign governments. The first article describes the Six Paths to Peace formulated by the National Unification Commission (NUC) during the administration of the former President Fidel Ramos (1992-1998). Its mandate was to produce a “viable general amnesty program and process that will lead to a just, comprehensive, and lasting peace.” This document in a way, according to the author, “has legitimized and validated the long demands of social sectors of civil society the need for comprehensive reforms to address structural inequalities and achieve lasting peace.” The recommendations of NUC were accepted by President Ramos as the basis of a peace policy of his administration. Although some reactions to the NUC after the public consultation brought forth issues and controversies, in the final assessment, the Six Paths to Peace remains the operational framework for the Philippine peace process to date.

The second article discusses the role of the NGOs in peace building. Many NGOs in the Philippines have espoused the “general goal of peace” wherein, though their main pursuit is focused on environmental protection, human rights, and development, some were engaged in advocacy and campaign to promote peace. Moreover, some religious groups—the Catholic and Protestant churches were engaged in peace advocacy work through dialogues and pastoral letters. On the grassroots level, peace was established through community unilateral declaration; while peace education was offered in some educational institutions in Mindanao and elsewhere in the Philippines and declared their schools as peace zones. Several peace research and training institutes and programs have emerged to collect database on conflicts in the Philippines and engaged in consortium studies.

The third article “Peace making in Southern Philippines” (2006) traced the beginning and growth of Moro and Mindanao Peace groups whose focus was on initiatives to address the Moros, Lumad and Christian migrant settlers in the context of Moro insurgencies. Assemblies were conducted in different cities as well as Muslim-Christian interfaith dialogues were undertaken by churches and religious congregations. Besides these, there was a growing interest in studying indigenous conflict resolution practices and concepts of peace and violence. In Mindanao, women professionals also worked on Mindanao agenda for peace and development from the gender perspective.

The fourth article discusses the integration of the MNLF forces into the PNP and AFP without demobilization and disbarment, which was observed to have been a success, although there were several problems such as culture shock, discrimination, and interrelations between the integrees and non-integrees, and lack of trust and confidence. Nonetheless, “despite the negative sentiments and incidents, training goals were met.”

The final article “The Mindanao Peace Process and the Challenges to Japan Peace Building Assistance” (2007) devoted its discussion on how Japan became a third-party builder in Mindanao. Japan’s role was not a mediator in Mindanao conflicts, but rather as a “development monitor”. Its role is not to duplicate what has already been done by other groups. Because of the many existing programs, there is more of a need to conduct impact assessment of such programs, which would be crucial in steering ongoing and future developments. It is believed that support for the socioeconomic programs might solve political problems in the area of conflict. Thus Japan was mostly concerned on the socio-economic component, which is the crux of peace undertaking and building.

This book is one of the most informative and thought-provoking documents that clearly elucidated the causes of events that led not only to very costly protracted conflicts but the great loss of human lives over the years in Mindanao. That despite all the interventions/mediations pursued by some countries and agencies—local, national, and international—to find peace solutions for Mindanao, yet the “Culture of Peace” could not be sought but continues to be elusive.

The publication of the book in 2013 is quite timely for this year, 2014, since there have been some development with regard to GRP-MILF agreement to address the need for peaceful solutions along political, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions. The author herself was appointed by the incumbent president of the Philippines to serve as chief negotiator on the GRP side. Her broad knowledge of the political upheaval created by both the Communist faction and the Moro Liberation organizations (MNLf and MILF) were based on thorough research; this makes the book credible and reliable. This book is strongly recommended as one of the required readings in Political Science classes in Philippine academic institutions. 📖