

Chasing the Conflict: Growth and Trajectory of Peace Studies in Mindanao

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This article traces the development of peace studies in Mindanao, arguing that Mindanao's distinct multicultural context ensured the field's tight linkage to Islamic and Mindanao studies. In all, the search for peaceful resolution of the armed conflicts in these parts of the Philippines provided the activist-inspired impetus for the field's growth and determined the highly localized focus of formal and nonformal peace education, research, and publications in and on Mindanao. Peace studies practitioners—from the academe, non-governmental organizations, and religious institutions—contributed to the shaping of national policies and programs for Mindanao, with government policy, in turn, buttressing the institutionalization of their initiatives. This article also provides comparative insights on the nature and evolution of Mindanao peace studies and that of Western peace studies.

Keywords Mindanao conflict, peace studies, peace education, Philippine peace process

Introduction

Like the Philippine peace movement, the development of peace studies in the Philippines was largely in response to the internal conflicts faced by the country and the desire to find a peaceful settlement. Its blossoming began post-1986 when the democratic space opened up after the Marcos dictatorship was overthrown. New initiatives around peace talks began. While these peace undertakings drew frameworks, expertise, and learnings from international sources, the impetus for its indigenous development in the country did not come from the global anti-war and anti-nuclear weapons movement that followed World War II and that spurred European and American peace studies (Rogers and Ramsbotham 1999, 742-43; Pureza and Cravo 2009, 7). Rather, the institutionalization of peace studies in academic institutions and as a segment of Philippine social movements and civil society formations was catalyzed by the need to address these internal

conflicts (Coronel Ferrer 1997). Peace studies as such has been driven to a large extent by the activism and social consciousness of their proponents and founders.

The country's armed conflicts with the communist and Moro liberation armed groups necessarily involved deep structural issues. As such, the approach to peace studies in the country was informed by the need for a historical perspective on the root causes of the conflicts. The notion of national peace was integrally linked to justice issues. This is evidenced by the early slogans used by campaigners around the vision of a just and lasting peace. The "justpeace" framework developed by John Paul Lederach (2005), which emphasized the larger perspective of conflict transformation that leads to just human relationships, was also a popular reference. According to the people directly involved in developing peace education at the graduate level in the late 1980s, peace was understood in its holistic sense, in contrast to the narrower disarmament framing of the "first wave" of peace education in the Western world (Toh, Floresca-Cawgas, and Durante 1992, 33).

This article focuses on the development of peace studies in Mindanao, the southernmost island grouping of the Philippines. It first provides a background of the distinct conflict context in Mindanao and why the quest for peace in the region has been a major endeavor in the past decades, thus meriting the focus of this article on peace studies in Mindanao. Here, I argue that "chasing the conflict" has characterized the trajectory of peace studies in this region, rooted (as the initiatives were) in efforts to address the local condition. In the third section, I examine the disciplinal, area, and programmatic intersections that have defined Mindanao peace studies, noting its integral link with both Mindanao area studies and Islamic studies. In the section, "Beyond Formal Peace Studies," I describe the practical work being done to support societal peace initiatives. In most of these sections, I have identified similarities and differences with the trajectory of peace studies in the West. The subsequent two sections go into further detail on the history of the formation of Mindanao-based peace institutions, followed by the kinds of research and publications that have been produced on the conflict. In the last section, I identify and consider the achievements, constraints, and prospects of peace studies in Mindanao.

The Mindanao Context

Mindanao hosts a multitude of indigenous communities and a settler population that originated from other parts of the country in the Visayas and Luzon regions. This unique mix of populations has given Mindanao a dynamic distinction from the rest of the country. Mindanao has also been the site of significant strife arising from several violent resource-based, political, and ideological conflicts across and within the different cultural communities therein.

Among the indigenous populations in what today make up thirty-five of the eighty-one provinces and six of the seventeen regions of the country, the largest cluster of thirteen ethnolinguistic groups belong to the Islamicized communities whom Spanish and American colonizers collectively ascribed as “*Moros*.” Subsequently, the pejorative colonial term became the self-ascribed identity as the “Bangsa Moro”—or “Moro Nation”—among those who rallied to the cause of the Moro liberation fronts. The Islamic communities used to be the majority population in the 1900s. Today, they constitute only about twenty percent of the Mindanao population spread out in different provinces. They remain the majority in only the five provinces of Sulu, Basilan, Tawi-tawi, Maguindanao, and Lanao del Sur. This “minoritization” and their subsequent economic and political marginalization are part of the grievances that gave rise to the ethnonationalist movements that initially wanted to secede from the Philippine Republic.

Subsequently, both the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)—the flag-bearers of the quest for the right to self-determination of the Bangsa Moro (subsequently altered to “Bangsamoro” by the MILF)—entered into decades of tumultuous peace negotiations with the government. During breakdowns in the talks, areas in Central and Western Mindanao where the MNLF and MILF presence was concentrated suffered from the series of large-scale internal displacements due to the fighting. It was not until 1996 when the Final Peace Agreement was signed with the MNLF. In 2014, the MILF signed the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro with the Philippine government.

The settler population, along with several indigenous highlanders, are concentrated in the northern and eastern regions of Mindanao. Here, fighters of the New People’s Army (NPA), the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), established guerilla bases. As in the Muslim-populated areas, these parts of Mindanao have witnessed intermittent warfare, with civilians disproportionately affected by the counter-insurgency operations against the CPP-NPA.

As such, Mindanao holds the distinction of having been the battleground of two distinct sets of armed groups since the 1970s: the Moro liberation fronts (more concentrated in the southern and western parts) and the CPP-NPA movement (which is present in changing degrees of concentration in the eastern and northern parts), while the central parts of Mindanao live through the confluence of both groups co-existing. The apex of the fighting with the MNLF was reached in the mid-1970s. The World Muslim Congress estimated sixty-thousand battle-related deaths by 1976 (Santos 2001, 13), prompting the Organization of Islamic Conference to intervene and facilitate the first political negotiations between the MNLF and the government during this period. However, while fighting generally ceased, the MNLF was not disbanded nor demobilized and local commanders continued to hold sway in their traditional stronghold areas, especially on the

islands of Sulu and Basilan and in Central Mindanao.

By the late 1980s and 1990s, the MILF was doing most of the fighting. The 1997 ceasefire agreement between the government and the MILF built hope for a peaceful resolution. It, however, suffered major challenges with fighting intermittently erupting in certain localities, punctuated by a major return to war, instigated by a shift in government policy under different presidents in April 2000 and February 2003, and the attacks launched by frustrated commanders in three areas in Central Mindanao when the Supreme Court struck down as unconstitutional an agreement that was set to be signed in August 2008. By the end of 2005, a World Bank-assisted report estimated that some nine hundred thousand people were forced to leave their homes since 2000 (Internal Displacement Monitoring Center [IDMC] 2007). The 2008 debacle, meanwhile, caused another round of displacement, with government estimating that seven hundred and fifty thousand people were displaced within the ten months that followed (IDMC 2009).

Warfare with the MNLF and MILF subsided and was reduced to isolated incidents after the comprehensive 1996 Final Peace Agreement with the MNLF and the 2012 Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro with the MILF (the precursor to the 2014 comprehensive agreement). Such isolated incidents, however, inflicted serious damage in certain localities—notably, the MNLF siege of Zamboanga City in 2013, which chalked up casualties in the thousands, and the 2015 “misencouter” between the Philippine police and various armed groups including those belonging the MILF in Mamasapano, Mindanao, where forty-four police officers were killed, along with eighteen MILF fighters, several civilians, and an undetermined number of fighters belonging to the other armed groups.

Meanwhile, the government continues to battle the CPP-NPA, the factions that have broken ranks with the two main Moro armed groups (notably the Abu Sayyaf Group and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters), and the new jihadist groups aligned with Al Qaeda (Jemaah Islamiyah and/or ISIS). Add to these sources of *unpeace* the horizontal conflicts between and within cultural communities over land and other resources, personal and family feuds, election-related killings, and the violence surrounding criminal activities. International Alert Philippines’ (2022) monitoring of various types of violent incidents in what is now the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (previously the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao) indicates a sharp decline in horizontal conflict between the government and the MNLF and MILF, but indicates significant spikes in conflict incidents from 2016 to 2017 largely involving violent extremist groups, criminal syndicates, family feuds, and electoral conflicts. While the incidence of violent conflict has been on a downward trend since 2018, current levels have not reached the lowest points achieved during the period of 2012-2015, when the peace talks with the MILF cumulatively progressed (International Alert Philippines 2022).

Nature of Mindanao Peace Studies

Given this history of social, political, and ideological armed conflicts in Mindanao, its unique demography, and its distinct political development compared to the rest of the country, the quest for peace—for most parts, defined as ending the armed conflicts, addressing its root causes, and sustaining it—has been a persistent endeavor among Mindanaoans (alternately spelled as Mindanawans). This article's focus on Mindanao as a particular and important site in the study of peace studies in the country and its trajectory is thus merited.

Peace studies as an academic program was actually jumpstarted in this region. Even before the 1986 democratic transition, Mindanao universities and civil society groups were already conducting interfaith dialogues and various cross-cultural community civic works. In the 1960s-1990s, young intellectuals from these regions wrote extensively on the conflict for their masters and doctoral degrees.

Nonetheless, I argue that for the most part, given the intractability of the armed conflicts, the several breakdowns in the peace processes with the armed groups, and the various crises faced by the country, the content of peace studies-related undertakings in Mindanao in the last thirty-five years revolved around pressing issues and challenges in these localities. McGinty (2022) calls this phenomenon “recentism,” or “temporality,” which privileges the study of the recent past and, consequently, overlooks the longer term, including the historical past. According to him, such focus affects our choices of levels of analysis, leaving out some important discourses.

Such temporality, however, was demanded by the situation; or, as the title of this article suggests, there was the need to chase the conflict. Peace studies and organizations needed to be relevant, updated with the latest developments, and responsive to a tenuous landscape. Peace studies as such has been driven to a large extent by the activism and social consciousness of their proponents and founders.

In fact, such activism likewise characterized the evolution of peace studies in the West (Pureza and Cravo 2009; Harris, Rank, and Fisk 1997). One may argue that the activist mooring has been unhinged today from their communities of origin, as peace studies became increasingly institutionalized in academic settings and internationalized. This may be because most of Europe and the United States (except for the cases of Northern Ireland and the Basque separatist movement in Spain) are not beset by internal conflicts. The engagement of peace studies in the West occurs in international settings, and thus largely does not have a domestic focus (even as there are actual challenges that threaten social peace in their own societies). On this part of the globe, on the other hand, “parochialism” may, up to a point, characterize the concerns of peace studies in Mindanao due to the

preoccupation with local concerns.

Disciplinary, Area, and Programmatic Intersections

Peace studies is necessarily multidisciplinary in scope, approaches, and application, although it draws its scholars from the social sciences first and foremost. This has been the case in Mindanao. The disciplinary grounding of most of the people who introduced peace studies and/or led the peace centers at their universities are in fields like education, sociology, political science, anthropology, and the like.

Similarly, peace education has been integrated mostly in humanities and social sciences programs. Steps have been taken to also bring the natural sciences into the disciplinary roster. At the Notre Dame Schools run by the Oblates of Mary, peace education principles, content and pedagogies have been infused in select core courses of the degree programs in philosophy, sociology, English, religious studies, economics, Philippine studies, and, last but not least, sciences (Coronel Ferrer 2013, 235). To ensure the buy-in and integration of the natural and applied sciences, Mindanao State University-Iligan Institute of Technology (MSU-IIT) rotates the leadership of its peace center among the different academic fields (*forumZFD* 2018).

In the Global North, peace studies was seen to be closely linked to the fields of international relations and development studies (Roger and Ramsbotham 1999, 751-52). In Mindanao, peace studies is integrally linked to Mindanao studies due to the multiple and layered dimensions of the social and political conflicts in the region that can only be understood with context, including its myriad cultures and particular historical development. Illustrative of the twinning of these two fields of study, MSU-IIT's celebration of the International Day of Peace in September 2012 was a lecture on Mindanao history.

Aside from peace studies, teacher-training programs offered by Mindanao peace education centers include elements of Mindanao studies, given the local context-driven evolution of peace studies in these regions. In 1991, the Ateneo de Zamboanga set up the Institute of Cultural Studies in Western Mindanao "in the belief that the history of conflict and violence is rooted in the lack of knowledge of the different cultures and religions," which acknowledged the need to incorporate local and regional history, cultures, and religions in the school curriculum (LaRousse 2001, 401-2). Interestingly, Xavier University's Mindanao Peace Center was later renamed "Mindanao Development Studies Center." In 2003, the Mindanao Studies Consortium Foundation (MSCF) was set up, with mostly Mindanao universities as its core members. The Foundation's concluded projects include the *Annotated Bibliography of Mindanao Studies*, Cultural Mapping Research, School of Peace Assessment, and volume 2 of the *Annotated Bibliography* series (covers peace, gender, and health studies) (Mindanao Studies Consortium Foundation 2005). Recently, the MSCF and the governmental Mindanao Development Authority advocated the creation of a Mindanao

Knowledge, Research and Policy Center that would harmonize and align research and policy studies of higher education with the thrusts and priorities of the twenty-year *Mindanao Peace and Development Framework Plan for 2011-2030* (Mindanao Development Authority 2020). Also known as *Mindanao 2020*, the plan acknowledges that “the context of their long history of peculiar difficulties and challenges. Mindanao 2020 is, at the outset, envisioned to provide a holistic and multi-dimensional framework, with greater emphasis than heretofore given to Mindanao history, culture, and social development. As a plan for both peace and development, it aims to integrate the work from a wider range of disciplines than previously undertaken, and by a wider range of social factors” (Mindanao Development Authority, n.d.).

Peace studies advances a normative, or ameliorative, goal of building peace. It has been described as a “post-positivist rapture in the field of international relations” with intended effects on and a clear commitment to the value of peace (Pureza and Caravo 2009, 3, 5-6). Similarly, according to Rogers and Ramsbotham (1999, 741-42), one of the defining characteristics of peace research that makes it a separate field of study is that it is “both an analytic and normative enterprise... [M]ost of the scholars attracted to the field were drawn by ethical concerns and commitments.” They are more concerned with the policy implications of their studies than with how they are received by other scholars (*ibid.*). This is true also in Mindanao. Peace studies as well as contemporary Mindanao studies have both an analytic and normative thrust.

Another academic field related to peace studies in Mindanao is Islamic studies. The region hosts the highest concentration of Filipino Muslims. The spread of Islam in the 12th-16th Centuries on these shores has had a significant and lasting impact in these localities. Naturally, the most Islamic studies degree programs and courses in the Philippines are located here. The eight campuses of the Mindanao State University (MSU) system offer a Bachelor of Arts in Islamic Studies degree program, as do Western Mindanao State University (WEMSU) in Zamboanga City, the Ateneo de Davao University (AdDU), and smaller private colleges in the region. The oldest Islamic Studies center in the country is the King Faisal Center for Islamic, Arabic and Asian Studies at MSU-Marawi City. A Maranao translation of a collection of articles on Islam and international humanitarian law edited by a Tunisian scholar was launched there in 2015. The translation project was supported by the International Committee of the Red Cross. Such undertakings reflect the confluence of Islam, conflict, and peace concerns in the region.

A more recent addition to tertiary Islamic Studies centers is the Al Qalam Institute for Islamic Identities and Dialogue in Southeast Asia at the AdDU. The institute situates the study of Islam and the Muslims and other peoples of Mindanao within the broader frame of Southeast Asian communities. Akin to peace studies, the program has a normative function: to contribute to the

fortification of spirituality that will strengthen a sense of belongingness to a bigger humanity founded on principles of social justice, gender equity, multiculturalism, religious pluralism, and sustainable peace and human development (Al Qalam Institute, n.d.).

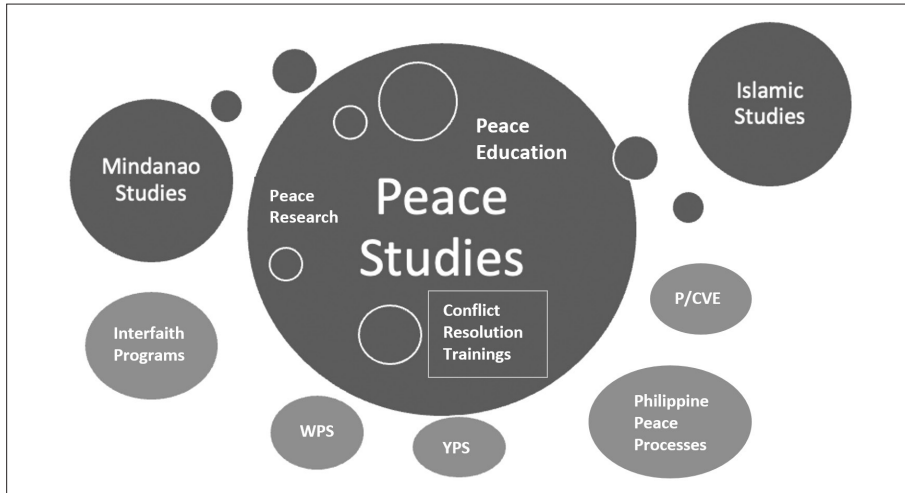
In effect, peace studies in Mindanao is, by its nature, linked to both Mindanao studies and Islamic studies. The porous boundaries across the three fields of studies have imbued the triangulation of interests with interconnected normative functions aimed at fostering peace in Mindanao.

Beyond Formal Peace Education

Peace education and conflict resolution trainings, updates, caucuses, and consultations on peace processes with the different armed groups, along with the rise of violent extremism, have consumed much of the time of the academe-based peace centers and diverse civil society organizations (CSOs) that are linked to each other under different, overlapping peace networks. Several members of the academe in Mindanao, notably at Notre Dame University (Philippines) (NDU), MSU, and WEMSU were actively engaged in the process leading to the 1996 signing of the Final Peace Agreement between the government and the MNLF. Faculty from these universities, along with faculty from the AddU, managed projects under the United Nations (UN) Multi-Donor Assistance Program for MNLF ex-combatants and their communities (Cagoco-Guiam 1999). These universities were also similarly engaged throughout the seventeen-year peace negotiations with the MILF and are most recently engaged with the current implementation-transition phase of the peace agreement. In 2008, many of them were involved in the research project, *Konsult Mindanaw*, organized by Catholic bishops and ulama leaders. More than three hundred focus group discussions were conducted to ask Mindanawans about their vision of peace for Mindanao and their recommendations for the peace process with the MILF, which had broken down after the controversial draft agreement was shot down by the Supreme Court (Floresca-Cawagas et al. 2013, 47). A more recent area of concern is the challenge of violent extremism, prompting more research and faculty extension service undertakings aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). Multisectoral events, meanwhile, are organized around the annual celebration of the Mindanao Week of Peace held in late November to early December, which began in 2001 by virtue of Proclamation Order No. 17 issued by former president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. The celebration aims to highlight “the common aspirations of Mindanaoans to live in peace, unity and harmony with each other regardless of status in life, religion, or culture.”

Another thrust in peace studies proper is along the lines of women, peace, and security (WPS) as outlined in UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 (UNSC 2000). In 2010, the Philippine government issued its National Action Plan on WPS. Subsequently, more activities along this track followed. The youth,

Figure 1. Intersection of Area Studies and Programs in Peace Studies in Mindanao, Philippines



Source: Author.

peace, and security (YPS) agenda of UNSC Resolution 2250 (UNSC 2015) is also catching on. MSU's IPDMs across Mindanao have dedicated campaigns around YPS.

The activism-parochialism that has animated much of the direction of peace studies in Muslim Mindanao has produced centers in academic settings that are both closely connected to national institutions and processes and buttressed by ground-level work with local communities. This can be gleaned from the combination of programs and projects that they undertake, the range of partnerships they enter into, the immersion and solidarity activities conducted by students, and the cluster of dissertation topics that examine grassroots initiatives and campaigns (Floresca-Cawagas et al. 2013). The flexibility in applying for “extension service” credit among MSU faculty members has enabled their participation in many of these activities and programs.

In the next section, I will backtrack with a brief history of the development of peace studies in Mindanao.

Development of Peace Studies in Mindanao

Early initiatives around what may fall under the rubric of peace studies were undertaken by campaigners, religious bodies, CSOs, and academic institutions through programs, desks, or extension service of faculty members. In fact, among the pioneers in the country were Mindanao-based institutions. The precursor to the more developed peace studies programs were the interfaith initiatives that

began in the 1970s. The American missionary-scholar Peter Gowing established the Dansalan Research Center in the Protestant-run Dansalan College in Marawi City. It undertook studies on Islam, religion, and culture with the end goal of contributing to Christian-Muslim understanding. Its journal, *Dansalan Quarterly*, published academic articles on Christian-Muslim relations in the Philippines and Southeast Asia.

The pioneering and, to date, most exhaustive recounting of the interfaith dialogue of the local churches in Mindanao-Sulu from 1965-2000 was done by the foreign missionary William LaRousse, who was based in the country from 1977-1995. Writing afterwards for his doctorate in Missiology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, he noted that energies for Christian-Muslim dialogue were sapped by the turn to war in the 1970s, and that consequently, church efforts were directed at humanitarian services and social action. Nationwide, Catholic churches concerned themselves with the killings and other human rights violations under martial law, including those committed against church members, giving “ecumenical work and establishing communications with Muslims” a low priority (LaRousse 2001, 335). As another study noted, during this period, the Maryknoll Sisters at the Notre Dame of Dulawan (now Datu Piang, in Maguindanao) initiated civic works such as free medical services, child and maternal care, and livelihood programs for affected communities (Cagoco-Guiam 1999). But following the end of the Marcos dictatorship in 1986, and as the Mindanao peace process agenda gained a foothold, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference in the Philippines revived such dialogues, alongside the issuance of appeals to the conflict protagonists to promote religious pluralism and peace based on justice (LaRousse 2001, 367-72). LaRousse (377-410) also provides a detailed background on the local approaches to dialogue initiated by leading figures among the Catholic church and orders in different parts of Mindanao, post-1986. Many of these initiatives continue to exist to date, including the Bishop-Ulama Forum, the Lanao Muslim-Christian Movement for Dialogue and Peace, the Silsilah Dialogue Movement in Zamboanga City, and the lay private association of women called Emmaus Dialogue Community in the same city.

At about the same time, peace studies-related initiatives in Mindanao Catholic schools and universities sprung as the country searched for ways out of the legacy of war wrought under the Marcos dictatorship. In 1987, the Jesuit-run Xavier University in Cagayan de Oro in Northern Mindanao launched its Mindanao Peace Studies Center with Dr. Bob MacAmis as director (Toh, Floresca-Cawagas, and Durante 1992, 5). In 1988, the Notre Dame Educational Association’s ten tertiary institutions and 112 schools from kindergarten to the secondary level adopted “Educating for Peace” as the theme of its jubilee celebrations.

The NDU set up a Center for Peace Education that undertook non-formal education outside of the academe, such as peace education sessions with the

military. The center also facilitated Christian-Muslim dialogues, provided secretariat support to peace networks like the Mindanao Peace Conference, and partnered with the government's National Peace Commission in holding regional workshops, among others. The NDU organized the first graduate degree program in peace and development in 1989,¹ and peace education was also infused into several undergraduate programs.

The NDU is run by the Oblates of Mary priests. Although a secular school, it has many Muslim students. The NDU led the first teacher-training programs on peace studies, which have subsequently expanded beyond its schools. In its heyday, the Center was very much in demand in non-formal peace education for a wide range of clientele that included the military, local governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and church leaders. The Ateneo de Zamboanga University's Peace Institute in Western Mindanao followed suit. It organized teacher-training programs on peace education and other peace-related campaigns and studies on the neighboring islands of Basilan, Sulu, and Tawi-tawi, and a graduate program in development education that included peace and development courses (Toh, Floresca-Cawagas, and Durante 1992, 22-27; Forum ZFD 2018, 2; Floresca-Cawagas et al. 2013, 47; LaRousse 2001, 400-4). In 1997, the Institute established a master's degree program in Peace Education (however, this is no longer listed in its degree program offerings).

The wave of peace education, engendered by the hopes of peaceful resolution to the armed conflicts in the country as well as inspired by the global Catholic movement promoting peace education, also blossomed in other parts of the country. In Metro Manila, Maryknoll College (now Miriam College), started in 1988 with a three-unit course titled "Introduction to Peace Studies" in its undergraduate International Studies degree curriculum. More related courses followed to constitute a minor program (Floresca-Cawagas et al. 2013, 39). In 1999, the Peace Education Network was formed with the Center for Peace Education (formally established in 1997) in Miriam College as the initiator and remains its coordinator-secretariat to date. Core members of the PEN are educators from member-schools of the Catholic Educators Association of the Philippines (CEAP), including those in Mindanao. Catholic peace education frames its values development along the lines of promoting a culture of peace and active non-violence. The adoption of peace education as the theme of CEAP's national convention in 2011 manifested its seriousness of purpose in advancing this frame.

State universities in Mindanao eventually caught up with the sectarian schools. One may argue, though, that the establishment of the MSU in 1961 through Republic Act 1387 was itself a peace project intended to build peace and development in Mindanao. Explicit in the rationale for MSU's creation and its mandate is the goal of mainstreaming Muslim Filipinos and other cultural communities into the national life. It was an affirmative action taken by Congress

through the initiative of a senator from the region to make education accessible for the youth in Mindanao (MSU, n.d.).

Nagasura Madale, PhD, a Maranao professor at the MSU in Marawi, established the Southern Philippines Peace Studies Center in the 1980s (Toh, Floresca-Cawagas, and Durante 1992, 4). However, it was not until 1998 when the MSU-IIT campus established the Iligan Center for Peace Education and Research, preceding what eventually became the IPDMs in seven of MSU's eight campuses.² Furthering this peace orientation, a proposed new charter for MSU filed in the House of Representatives in 2015 designates it as the "National Peace University."

Currently MSU's IPDMs classify their programs as Peace Research, Peace Education, Peace Action. Peace and development is one of eight thematic priorities in the area of research and extension service system-wide. Like the now defunct NDU Peace Education Center, they offer teacher-training on integrating peace education/pedagogy/issues at the elementary and secondary levels.

In preparation for the reinforced peace mandate in its proposed new charter, MSU's IPDMs, and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) in the Philippines held the Training Workshop on Effective Integration of Peace with the aim of further institutionalizing peace education in their course modules, course syllabi, classroom activities, and assessment mechanisms. However, because of the tedious effort of institutionalizing new course offerings and degree programs on peace studies in state universities, progress was slow for implementing degree programs dedicated to peace studies.

Outside of the Catholic school system in Mindanao, NGOs complement the peace studies infrastructure. The Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute (MPI, established in 2000) offers annual trainings to a select set of cohorts working in various CSOs involved in peacebuilding not only in Mindanao but also Southeast Asia and beyond, thereby enriching content with comparative learning on peace building in other conflict-affected areas. The Catholic Relief Services established a Peace and Reconciliation Program and the German NGO called forumZFD has a peace education program for teachers. The Civil Peace Service of GIZ, another German development agency, works on resource conflicts and the government-MILF peace processes.

Along the same lines of infusing peace studies in the school system, an Islam-based peace education program for the autonomous region of Muslim Mindanao has also been developed as of 2011, with the support of Australia Aid (Floresca-Cawagas et al. 2013, 47-48). Smaller state colleges and provincial universities in the region have all been brought into the loop of peace education in different degrees.

Research and Publishing on Peace and Conflict in Mindanao

Scholarly writings from the late 1960s onward related to the conflict in Mindanao, and subsequently the peace process, constitute a considerable body of literature produced by Filipino social science scholars from the region. The writings were not written specifically under the rubric of peace studies, but rather, under the disciplinary field in which they were writing for their respective dissertations or in the course of their academic careers. This section will not attempt an all-encompassing literature review of this collection. My aim is to illustrate how the conflict preoccupied many scholars and the range of topics and subthemes they examined that are relevant to peace studies in and of Mindanao.

Among Mindanaoan historians, the most revered is Cesar Adib Majul (1973; 1978; 1985). From the 1960s to the 1980s, the late professor at the University of the Philippines published innumerable articles and monographs on topics like the coming of Islam and Christianity in Southeast Asia, the Moro Wars, the contemporary Muslim movement, and several local studies as well on Sulu sultans and politics—altogether, a seamless crossing of the three area studies that I discussed in previous sections. The American missionary Gowing (1983), along with Tan (2004), Tiu (2005), and Donoso (2013) are other notable Philippine-based Mindanao historians. Others like Madale (1984), Glang (1969), Tanggol (1993), and Muslim (1994) problematized the ways and means the conflict may be resolved. Writings of Moro Front leaders have also come out to articulate their perspectives, notably those of Nur Misuari (1992), Salah Jubair (1997; 1999; 2007), and the MILF founder himself, Hashim Salamat (1985; 2002). Most of these tracks on the armed conflict and the liberation fronts highlighted the differentiated evolution of the region as the context that gave rise to the self-determination movements. Madale (1986) and Wadi (2006), meanwhile, locate the movement within the global Islamic movement.

Other Filipino scholars, among them anthropologists, sociologists, and historians, offered more nuanced views of the conflicts, their diverse manifestations and origins and, generally, the political development of Mindanao beyond the Islamic communities and the myriad tensions therein. Among them are Rodil (1992; 2000; 2004), Azurin (1998), Abinales (2000, 2010), Alejo (2000), Gaspar (2012), Torres (2014), Lara (2014), Lara and Schoofs (2016), Yusingco (2013), Coronel Ferrer (2020), and Canuday and Sescon (2022). Special mention may be made of the now defunct Alternate Forum for Research in Mindanao, an independent outfit in Davao City that produced seminal writings on the political economy of Mindanao and land and other resource-based conflicts especially in areas inhabited by the different indigenous tribes on the Mindanao mainland. Meanwhile, foreign scholars like Che Man (1990) and McKenna provide an outsider perspective on the liberation fronts. Ahmad (2000) brought to the fore

issues of class differentiation in Muslim Mindanao. Authors like Turner, May, and Turner (1992) and Noble (1994) did scoping work on social and political issues confronting Mindanao, while others like Warren (2021, first edition was published in 1981), Hedman and Sidel (2000), Kiefer (2001), Tiu (2005), and Hayase (2007) provided in-depth local studies crucial to an informed understanding of the backdrop of contemporary conflicts in these areas.

Writings that “chase the conflict” further enrich peace studies on and in Mindanao. The last two decades of the peace process, in fact, have generated a wealth of literature that, one may say, “chase the peace.” Among these are writings on the role of women in conflict and peace processes in Mindanao (Hall and Hoare 2015), civil society and peacebuilding (Cagoco-Guiam 1999), children involved in the armed conflict (Özerdem, Podder, and Quitoriano 2010), interfaith dialogues and missionary work in the region (LaRousse 2001; Torres, 2015; Carreon 2020), internal displacement (Canuday 2009), the peace negotiations with the MNLF and the MILF (Rodil 2000; Iribani 2006; Jubair 2007; Flores 2019; Coronel Ferrer 2013; Santos 2001; Hutchcroft 2016), peace advocacy (Gaspar, Lapad, and Maravillas 2002; Timonera and Moderno 2013), traditional dispute resolution mechanisms (Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies 2013), and post-1996 peace agreement challenges (Vitug and Gloria 2000; Coronel Ferrer 2010; several articles in *Kasarinlan*, University of the Philippines Third World Studies Center, 2000). Meanwhile, writings like that of Ressa (2003), Banlaoi (2007), Santos (2019), and Santos and Santos (2010) examined the rise of radical jihadist groups in the region or provided a comparative perspective across the Moro armed groups. A critical account of the 2017 month-long battle in Marawi City between the Philippine military and ISIS-affiliated groups were written by Fonbuena (2020) and Yabes (2020). A flurry of publications including studies and conference proceedings of themes associated with the Bangsamoro peace process (such as regional autonomy, federalism, the peace negotiations with the MNLF and the MILF, and so on) are also available, produced by specialized institutions like the Cotabato City-based Institute of Autonomy Good Government and the Institute of Bangsamoro Studies, the now defunct Penang-based Southeast Asian Conflict Studies Network, the Siem Reap-based Center for Peace and Conflict Studies, as well as that of MSU’s IPDMs and other centers in various Mindanao universities.

In all, literature by Philippine—and especially Mindanawan—authors on peace and conflict in Mindanao has been prolific in recent decades. It is striking that while a lot has been published on the Moro liberation movements, books focused on the CPP-NPA-National Democratic Front (NDF) in Mindanao and the peace process relating to this conflict are scarce. Some books that locate themselves in the context of this conflict include the deeply personal narrative of an insider recounting her struggles inside the movement in Mindanao in the 1980s (Abreu 2009) and reflections on the Davao scene throughout the

tumultuous decades (Gomez 2005). Comparatively fewer books have also been written in the last two decades on the stalled peace negotiations on this front with the government and the impact of the war on these localities.

The books and academic journal articles cited here, it should be noted, were produced through other institutional channels other than the peace studies centers in Mindanao, although among the writers in the edited volumes were some who were affiliated with the latter. The problem of low-level in-house publication output is systemic. An assessment of MSU-Marawi, the flagship campus of the MSU system points to insufficient institutional support, overloading of teaching assignments, poor motivation to publish, and limited study grants as the factors for the low research output (Paca, Valdez, and Manalundong 2017).

Nonetheless, affiliates of the peace centers have participated as contributors, researchers, writers, and/or participants in several policy-oriented studies or collaborated with other scholars and practitioners in foreign-funded research undertakings and some with in-house resources. A 2017 list of Gender and Development research studies involving MSU-IIT professors covers topics like radicalization and violent extremism (with studies that focus on women and youth who join such groups and the role of mothers in preventing violent extremism), gender issues relating to crime reporting and mental health among internally displaced persons, and gendered roles and social cohesion in select Islamic communities, among others (Tanggol 2017).

In all, the difficulty of sourcing research funds that require sustained support or multiyear programming has meant that research has been generally of short-term duration. Consequently, there are no long-term research programs or database building being undertaken in the academic setting like the massive databases on peace and conflict being generated by the peace research programs of universities in Uppsala in Sweden, Edinburgh in the United Kingdom, or the Kroc Institute at the Notre Dame University in the United States. At best, an independent international NGO, International Alert Philippines, maintains the World Bank-funded Bangsamoro Conflict Management System, a database on conflict incidents in Muslim Mindanao (see International Alert Philippines, n.d.) in partnership with the MSU Marawi and General Santos campuses and the Western Mindanao State University.

Achievements and Prospects

As we can see, most peace studies initiatives in Mindanao universities have been directed at integrating peace education through teacher training, curriculum development, and various other forms of extension services. Such a thrust has assumed a strategic and long-term quality. Its value in transforming mindsets

and inculcating a culture of peace cannot be underestimated. Notably, funds from government, international NGOs, and donor agencies have been important in this regard. There are also functional local and international networks that, all together, constitute a national support structure for peace education. Moreover, the government's peace education policy has provided the needed mantle of legitimacy and the push to take peace education seriously, especially in state colleges and universities, and the whole public school system that had fallen behind their sectarian counterparts in the 1990s.

Government, itself, had to undergo a learning curve before it arrived at officially acknowledging the importance of peace education. When the NDU applied for accreditation of their peace studies program at the Department of Education in the late 1980s, the bureaucracy was clueless about the field. It wondered if the degree offered good prospects for employment. In order to get the Department's approval for the new course offering, the degree program was changed to "peace and development" since Development Studies was already known in education circles (Toh, Floresca-Cawagas, and Durante 1992, 18). Toh served as a visiting professor.

Government policy progressed alongside the growing national awareness of the need to find peaceful settlements to the armed conflicts besetting the nation. The first groundbreaking policy is known as the "Six Paths to Peace"—a document produced by a nationwide consultation process led by the National Unification Commission that was created by President Fidel V. Ramos in 1992 and adopted as government peace policy. One of the "six paths" was the promotion of a culture of peace, the track on which peace education was hinged and was increasingly legitimized as a state pursuit. Altogether, the six paths provided for a comprehensive approach that would address the underlying causes of conflict and potentially lead to peaceful political settlements.³

This was followed in 2001 by Executive Order (EO) No. 3 by then-Philippine president Macapagal Arroyo upholding the primacy of the peace agenda (President of the Philippines 2001). Subsequently, Medium Term Development Plans included a peace pillar. Issued in 2006, EO No. 570 focused on mainstreaming peace education in basic formal and non-formal curricula, as well as in education degree programs (President of the Philippines 2006). It was this EO that spurred MSU's Board of Regents to issue Resolution No. 107 in 2007 mandating the creation of the IPDMs.

However, as noted earlier, offerings of full degree programs in peace studies, conflict resolution, and the like did not necessarily follow suit in the state-run academic institutions. The introduction of new degree programs not only requires human, financial, and library resources, it involves a tedious academic review process. Private universities like the NDU and the Jesuit universities have more flexibility. However, resources can also be a problem, and priorities may change with turnovers in the administration leadership. The demise of the pioneer peace

centers at the NDU in Cotabato City and Xavier University in Cagayan de Oro is reflective of these constraints. The closures of the graduate programs devoted to peace, peace education, or peace and development that were initially offered reflect a return to more traditional generic offerings like Development Studies or Education where peace studies are instead infused.

Enjoying greater flexibility, some NGOs like the Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute are forging ahead with planned new courses on more current themes, such as environmental peace, digital peacebuilding, and conflict-sensitive/peace journalism (MPI, n.d.). MPI has proven to be a sustainable and popular enterprise. Funded by the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, Catholic Relief Services, and Mennonite Central Committee, it has provided a need at the informal level.

Meanwhile, based on their own assessments, peace centers' monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are underdeveloped. More often, assessments done are short-term, bereft of a longer view (forumZFD 2018). Similarly, research funds either from within the institutions or externally sourced have been limited, while research has tended to be piecemeal and project-based book publications rare.

The gaps in human, material, and financial resources of most academe-based centers remain a challenge. While much has been done to reach out to teachers, to be fully integrated, peace education requires the full institutional buy-in and support of administration leadership (Floresca-Cawagas et al. 2013, 49). To achieve deep localization, local governments likewise need to be brought into the loop. As Chancellor Bai Hejira Nefertiti Limbona of MSU-Maguindanao noted, local government officials must tap into what the academe can offer and must craft their own localized peace and development policy (Rasul 2022).

To their credit, by supporting, and at times serving, as critical interlocutors of the national peace processes, peace studies centers and specialists in Mindanao have been able to have impact on national policy. MSU IPDMs, for example, participated in crafting the government's National Action Plans on Women Peace and Security, and on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism. As Yasmira Moner, the acting director of the IPDM at the MSU-IIT said, they have credibility and legitimacy. Moreover, they fulfill a unique role in facilitating dialogues and advancing the leadership of women and youth in peace and development (ibid.).

Such heavy engagement on peace and conflict issues of the day makes for relevance. But such engagement has also taken time and resources away for more in-house and in-depth research and book publications that could also inform strategies and policies. While there has been no dearth of academic literature about the conflicts and peace initiatives in Muslim Mindanao, these were mostly produced outside of the peace institutions. Moreover, most literature has been on the Moro fronts and peace processes and less on the communist front, which has suffered major setbacks in terms of pursuing a peaceful political settlement.

Recentism and parochialism are gradually being overcome with international

exposure and an upcoming generation of young people who did or are doing their postgraduate degrees in other countries with diverse dissertation topics that offer a longer and deeper view of the past and nuanced understanding of the many dimensions of the present. The spirit of Southeast Asian regionalism stemming from the acknowledgment of the close sociocultural and historical links of Mindanao with its neighboring countries in the South is also enlarging the frame of inquiry beyond Mindanao or Philippine studies.

In the next decades, given how glued the history of peace studies in Mindanao has been to local peace and conflict dynamics, other priorities and campaigns, courses and degree programs can be expected as the national and local conflicts transform or persist in old and new ways. In this way, Mindanao peace studies and all the local nuances that it brings to light can contribute to the critical reevaluation of what Pureza and Cravo (2009, 9-10, 14) deride as the standardized approaches to peacebuilding and a methodological predisposition that remains state-centric or dependent on a centralized legitimate power at the national or global systemic level.

Peace studies, as applied to the local, is constantly carving its own path. As the armed conflict and peace process with the CPP-NPA-NDF takes center stage, perhaps more studies and initiatives will follow. As peace conditions become relatively better, the pull of the politics of the moment can ease up and free up resources and energies that will strengthen the teaching and research pool at the university setting, internationalize concerns and linkages, and facilitate more knowledge production, theory building, and database development. However, to accomplish this, peace studies practitioners in Mindanao must continue to be reflexive and open to broader and diverse perspectives. It must consciously guard against co-optation by forces of dominance and hegemonic discourse. Even as it is being increasingly institutionalized, peace studies in Mindanao must not abandon its activist beginnings and linkages with social movements if it is to keep and sustain a critical edge.

Notes

1. Australian educator Toh Swee-Hin worked with NDU's Ofelia Durante and CEAP's Virginia Floresca-Cawagas to synthesize a framework of six clusters of issues that were deemed emblematic of the period: (1) militarization (crucially linked to the presence of US military bases in the country [subsequently repealed in 1992] on the one hand, and the counter-insurgency operations unleashed after talks broke down between the government and the CPP-NPA-NDF in January 1987, among others); (2) structural violence (poverty, North-South gap, and unequal trade); (3) human rights (noting in particular the rise of vigilante groups casting a wide net on the left opposition, children's and women's rights); (4) environmental care; (5) cultural solidarity (including the "Christian-Muslim divisiveness" and displacement of indigenous populations); and (6) personal peace. The framework,

along with its four-point pedagogy (holism of the six clusters, values education, dialogue, and conscientization) informed the peace education degree program at NDU as well as similar undertakings that followed (Toh, Floresca-Cawagas, and Durante 1992, 7-14; Floresca-Cawagas et al. 2013, 56-57).

2. The eight autonomous campuses of the MSU system are: (1) MSU-Main in Marawi City; (2) MSU-IIT in Iligan City; (3) MSU-TCTO in Tawi-Tawi; (4) MSU-Naawan in Misamis Oriental; (5) MSU-Maguindanao; (6) MSU-General Santos; (7) MSU-Sulu in Jolo; and (8) MSU-Buug in Zamboanga Sibugay.

3. The Six Paths to Peace are as follows: (1) pursuit of social, economic, and political reforms that would address the root causes of the conflict; (2) consensus-building and empowerment for peace through continuous consultations at the national and local levels; (3) peace negotiations with the armed groups; (4) measures for reconciliation, reintegration of former combatants, and rehabilitation of conflict-affected areas; (5) conflict management and protection of civilians; and (6) building and nurturing a culture of peace (National Unification Commission 1993).

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