

## 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 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 has set aside talks with the CNN to concentrate on one deal 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, like NPA attacks, etc., 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 in 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.

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.

## 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

## 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.

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.

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 down 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 Hukbahalap 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 news-

rooms 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-academician 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 & Chamsky, 1988/2002: 19) notes that

Newsworkers 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 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.

### 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 Cavitex, 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? (Tiglao, 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><b>ABS-CBN</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Lopezes, through Lopez Holdings Corporation (formerly Benpres Holdings Corporation)</li> <li>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</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/">http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/</a> (online news portal)</li> <li>Magazines: <i>Metro</i>, <i>Metro Home &amp; 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></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Operates three AM band and 14 FM band stations</li> <li>AM: DZMM</li> <li>Radio Patrol 630 Manila; also in Palawan, Cebu, Davao</li> <li>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</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flagship station is ABS-CBN Channel 2, regional network of 25 originating stations, eight affiliates, and strategically located</li> <li>Relay stations across the archipelago</li> <li>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!</li> <li>Cable television channels: ABS-CBN News Channel, Balls, Cinema One, DZMM TeleRadyo, Hero, Jeepney TV, Knowledge Channel, Lifestyle Network, Myx, O Shopping</li> <li>International networks: ABS-CBN International, ANC International, BRO, Cinema One International, Myx TV (North America), The Filipino Channel</li> <li>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</li> <li>UHF: San Pablo, Pampanga, Antique, Dipolog, Balanga, Rizal, Lipa, Bulacan, Tarlac, Tagaytay, Nueva Ecija, Dagupan, La Union, Tandag, Sipalay, Mati, Lucena, Baler, Roxas, Calapan</li> <li>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</li> </ul>



Owner and business	Newspapers	Radio stations	TV stations
<p><b>GMA News</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GMA Holdings, Inc.</li> <li>GMA is mostly owned by the Duavit, Gozon and Jimenez families</li> <li>Law, real estate, talent management, films, banking, finance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GMA News Online, Philippine Entertainment Portal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>24 radio stations throughout the country</li> <li>AM: Super Radyo DZBB 594 kHz; also in Iloilo, Cebu, Davao</li> <li>FM: Barangay LS 97.1 DWLS FM</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Operates a network of 47 VHF and 33 UHF TV stations throughout the country</li> <li>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</li> <li>International TV channels: GMA Pinoy TV, GMA Life TV, GMA News TV International</li> </ul>
<p><b>Kapatid TV 5</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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</li> <li>Electricity distribution in Metropolitan Manila, telecommunications, water distribution services, tollways, hospitals, mining</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>InterAksyon.com (TV 5's online news portal)</li> <li>Through Hastings Holdings, Inc., shares in: <i>Philippine Star</i> (51% share), BusinessWorld Publishing Corp. (70% share), <i>Philippine Daily Inquirer</i> (12% share)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Originating stations: Radyo 5 92.3 News FM, Palawan, Bacolod, Cebu, Cagayan De Oro, Davao, General Santos</li> <li>Relay from DWFM Manila</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kapatid TV 5 and Pilipinas Global Network Ltd (TV 5 International)</li> <li>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 TV 5, Aksyon TV</li> <li>International: U.S., Canada, Middle East, North Africa, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Guam Australia, Papua New Guinea, Hong Kong</li> </ul>
<p><b>Philippine Daily Inquirer</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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%)</li> <li>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</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inquirer.net (online news portal), <i>Philippine Daily Inquirer</i>, <i>Inquirer Libre</i>, <i>Bandera</i>, <i>Cebu Daily News</i>, <i>Hinge Inquirer Publication</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Radyo Inquirer DZIQ 990 AM</li> </ul>	

Owner and business	Newspapers	Radio stations	TV stations
<p>PhilSTAR Daily, Inc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 51.0% owned by the PLDT Group through Hastings Holdings, Inc.</li> <li>• Remaining majority shares belong to the family of Feliciano R. Belmonte Jr., a congressman and long-time speaker of the House of Representatives</li> <li>• Printing, Internet company</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="http://www.philstar.com/">http://www.philstar.com/</a> (an online news portal), <i>Philippine Star, Pilipino Star Ngayon, The Freeman, Banat, People Asia Magazine</i></li> </ul>		
<p>Manila Bulletin Publishing Corporation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 54.18% owned by U.S. Automotive Co., Inc. Emilio T. Yap has 0.74% ownership</li> <li>• Hotel, bank, university, medical laboratory, investment, real estate, automotive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Manila Bulletin, Tempo, Balita, Philippine Panorama, Style Weekend, Travel Magazine</i></li> <li>• Monthly magazines: <i>Agriculture, Cruising, Sense and Style, Animal Scene, Sports Digest, Liwayway, Bisaya, Hilgaynon, Bannawag</i></li> </ul>		

### 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.

1 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](http://www.facebook.com/KapayapaanCampaignPH/Info?ref=page_internal)>.

2 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.

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. 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 the 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 Kapayapaan<sup>2</sup> added its support.
- Late last year a separate, informal initiative<sup>2</sup> 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, 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 peacebuilding 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".

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