# The Moro (Muslim Mindanao) Question and the Media Coverage: *The Philippine Daily Inquirer*

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## ABSTRACT

The study attempted to explore how the political question of the Moros (Muslim Mindanao) was covered by Philippine media, specifically The Philippine Daily Inquirer. It examined how much coverage the newspaper allocated as part of its agenda setting and how the paper framed the Moro issue. Some indicators are citations of the historical roots of the conflict, the attempted agreements between Philippine government and the Moros: 1976 (Tripoli agreements), 1996 (GRP-MNLF agreement), 2010 (GRP-MILF memorandum), and 2016 BBL draft proposal.

The study is significant because it took place amid rising public clamor and inquiry about media fairness and integrity, and the perspectives it spouses. The government was also trying to reach the insurgents for negotiated settlement. The study expects to serve as an insight for improved media coverage: comprehensive and contextualized. Since news impacts public perception, subsequently public participation may contribute to shaping peace, peace perspectives, and peace process. This may be reflected in the referendum on BBL among citizens in general, and voters in particular, since resolution of the conflict has serious implications locally and beyond the national boundary.

The Philippine Daily Inquirer was chosen for this study because it is widely read by the intelligentsia who lead public opinion. The data was gathered from The Daily Inquirer (June 2016- December 2017). Content Analysis was used to collect, categorize, and analyze news stories to answer the research question. The findings show the scanty coverage given to the Moro issue generally framed along military skirmishes/confrontations with nearly none on the turns, ups and downs of the peace process.

*Keywords: Moro, framing, categorization, BBL, peace, peace process, Philippine Daily Inquirer*

**Rationale**

This is an exploratory study on the media coverage of the "Moro question," the question on Muslims in Mindanao commonly known as Moros. This issue/question has been there for nearly five decades both as an active armed resistance and as a partner in peace negotiation with the central government of the Republic of the Philippines.

The study delved into the extent/scope of media coverage of Moro, particularly with the question: how much of it takes Inquirer's agenda (central or peripheral), and how it is framed in the news coverage—its contextualization and the extent to which it is treated as either a national issue/concern or a minority problem. The Philippine Daily Inquirer is a national broadsheet whose audience reach of paramount importance. Moro political question had been at its peak in the 1970s, for Mindanao was the hot spot of armed confrontation.

The Moro question originally started as a demand for secession from the Republic of the Philippines to form a separate independent state (homeland) for the Moros. The conflict went through different faces and phases.

However, 1996 was a turning point when the Tripoli Agreement was signed between the government of the Republic of the Philippines and Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). The conflict started taking a different course. The armed wing of the struggle had to give primacy to the political process. Ceasefire turned to be the order of the day. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) continued the armed struggle as an off-shoot of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) until it signed a ceasefire agreement with the Philippine government.

As a result, negotiation became nearly a permanent face of the struggle, fully substituting the armed struggle that both organizations originally espoused. The change of the means, from arms to roundtable negotiations, brought about three sides of the conflict together: Philippine government, MNLF, and MILF. Negotiation fully replaced armed confrontation. Ceasefire was ordered. The will to continue the peace process has been frequently displayed though there was no conclusive achievement.

Successive governments pushed the peace process into a reasonable conclusion, however unsuccessfully. The last futile attempt was the BBL –a proposal to grant autonomy to the Moros to govern themselves.

Media coverage takes many forms, shapes, and approaches in as many ways as reporters and media organizations are. The study explored the question of the Moros through the eyes of mass media. It examined how much coverage the media gave—how and in what context it framed the issue: the historical roots of the conflict, the potential resolutions such as the different agreements between Philippine government and the Moro: 1976 (Tripoli agreements), 1996 (GRP- MNLF agreement), 2010 (GRP-MILF) and 2016 abortive BBL draft. The 1976 Tripoli agreement was the first signed between the MNLF and the Marcos government that gave a new direction to the conflict when the armed wing of the struggle gave primacy to the political process.

The coverage includes/contextualizing the roots of the conflict (historical), the many attempts (resolutions) in the form of agreements between Philippine government and the Moros: 1976 (Tripoli agreements), 1996 (GRP-MNLF agreement), 2010 (GRP-MILF agreement 2016 BBL draft and the Philippine media coverage.

This study tried to explore if the coverage included /contextualized the roots of the conflict (historical), the many attempts of agreements between Philippine government and the Moro: 1976 (Tripoli agreements), 1996 (GRP-MNLF agreement), 2010 (GRP-MILF agreement) 2016 BBL draft and the Philippine media coverage.

This study is conducted in 2018 which makes it of paramount importance compared to the previous attempts of the 70's, 80's, and 90's when any armed resistance with Islamic flavor was nearly within the orbit of global capitalism, a concrete example being that of Afghanistan beginning in the 80's.

At present, justified or unjustified, legitimate or not, any armed resistance with Islamic flavor is tantamount to being an integral part of "global terrorist network," which automatically delegitimizes the cause of the armed struggle. This puts champions of armed struggle as terrorists. At present, "terrorism" is an important commodity in international relations where countries support each other in the name of fighting "terrorism" and delegitimize even legitimate people's causes. At times, it is a tool of suppressing dissent and democratic aspiration.

The sudden emergence of the Maute "rebellion" in the already conflict–ridden Mindanao resulted to the swift move of the Philippine government to suppress the rebellion once and for all. The plebiscite that was recently held to determine public sentiment and mode of governance was also accompanied by several incidents of conflict. Whether rising

from the ashes of war or delving into war, conflict has become a feature of the life of the Moros. This strengthens and solidifies the view that the Moro issue knows no tomorrow.

Therefore, the study examined how Philippine mass media, particularly the Philippine Daily Inquirer, covered/framed the Moro question. The Philippine media coverage plays major, if not central role, in shaping commonly shared perceptions reflected in taking political positions—seeing the issue as that which shapes, at least, one national identity, diverse people under one flag. The study expects to highlight the need for a more thorough, more comprehensive, and sufficiently contextualized understanding of the issue. The findings can help improve media coverage that impacts public perception, which can subsequently shape public participation, therefore contributing to shaping peace, peace perspectives, and peace process.

The study sees its significance in being done amidst rising public clamor and inquiry about media integrity, fairness, and the perspectives it spouses. The study expects to highlight better media coverage, which entails more comprehensive, contextualized, and deeper understanding of the issue. The study is also expected to help improve public perception, and eventually public participation, in shaping peace and peace process.

Furthermore, the study is significant since it is done during the time when the Philippine government is considering negotiations with nearly all armed insurgents in the Philippines.

**Scope and Limitation**

The study focused on the single Moro/Muslim issue in Philippine print media, specifically The Philippine Daily Inquirer—a daily broadsheet located in Metro Manila. The coverage was also limited to news section only. The study deployed content analysis and is limited to the presidency of the current administration.

**Study Framework**

The Philippine Daily Inquirer is a national broadsheet covering urban and rural Philippines, as well as, international affairs in accordance with its own priorities, journalistic measures, and it's political and socio-cultural orientations that are particular to the newspaper. Such factors are central because they determine the scope and frame of coverage.

The Inquirer appeals to the national elite and has gained wider readership among them too. The national daily covers the Moro question as one of its local issues important to the public opinion leaders who connect the public to the medium. This process, in turn, contributes in shaping public perception on the issue.

This study is anchored on the combination of communication theories such as Agenda-Setting and Framing.

Agenda-Setting Theory or The Agenda-Setting Function of the Mass Media was first put forth by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (*Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1972). They originally suggested that the media sets the public agenda, in the sense that they may not exactly tell what to think, but what to think about.

In choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping realities. Readers learn not only about a given issue but also how important it is to attach to that issue, from the amount of information in a news story and its position. In reflecting what candidates say during a campaign, the mass media may well determine the important issues—that is, the media may set the "agenda" for the campaign.

McCombs and Shaw went on Agenda-Setting at great length and produced many articles and research on the various facets of the theory. Since their introduction of this theory there has been a plethora of research regarding its uses, and there now exists an extension of the theory called Second Level Agenda Setting. This theory is intended to apply to news media; although in certain cases, it has been applied to other areas and messages which they transmit to audiences.

Media influences the order of presentation in news reports about events and issues in the public mind. The more importance media gives to certain news, the more importance the audience attribute. Media prioritizes what and how people should think. Most studies show media uses objects or issues to influence what people should think about.

The main concept associated with the Agenda Setting Theory is gate keeping. Gate keeping controls the selection of content discussed in the media; the public cares mostly about the product of a media gate keeping. Media itself is a gatekeeper. News media decides 'what' events to admit through media 'gates' on grounds of 'newsworthiness'.

News come from various sources; editors decide what/what not to choose as gatekeepers. Media's content provides a lot of time and

space to certain issues, making them more vivid. Media gives utmost importance to certain news, which gives people the impression that headlines carry the most important information. A particular news is carried as a headliner, covered every day for months.

Arowolo (2017) posited that Framing Theory explains that media create this frame by introducing new items with predestined and narrow contextualization, and how media places its stories within the field of meaning—focusing on communication as a process of making sense of the world (Bruggman, 2014). Framing looks at how media presents a particular story to the audience. Media primes news by repeating it and giving it more importance. The concept of Framing was first introduced by Gregory Bateson (1972). He defined psychological frames as a 'spatial and temporary bounding of set of interactive messages that operate as a form of meta-communication (Hallahan, 2008). Framing describes the practice of thinking about news items and story content within familiar context. It is a process of selective control, a way in which news content is typically shaped and contextualized within the same frame of reference.

Audience adopt the frames of reference and see the world in a similar way. People attach importance to news through how the media frames it, in ways where people would perceive it in a particular/different way. Same storyline is framed in different ways, depending on which media view will be perceived differently.

Framing deals with how media places its stories within the field of meaning. It focuses on communication as a process of making sense of the world (Bruggman, 2014); thus, Framing looks at how media presents a particular story to the audience.

Semeko and Valkenbug (2000) identified news frames or focus, wherein human interest, economic interest, morality, and responsibility frames interactive messages. Framing describes the practice of thinking about news items and story content within familiar context.

Framing is related to the Agenda-Setting tradition, but expands the research by focusing on the essence of the issues at hand, rather than on a particular topic. Framing Theory bases itself on the idea that media pays attention on certain events, then places them within a field of meaning (*Mass Communication Theory*, 2017).

Framing Theory suggests that something presented to the audience (the frame) can greatly influence the choices people make about how to process that information. Frames are abstractions that work to

organize or structure message meaning, such as the frame of the news or media place on the information they convey.

Conflict emphasizes tension between individuals, institutions, and countries to attract audience interest. It is mainly concerned with narratives of triumph or loss (Van Cauwenberge, Gelders & Joris, 2009). The Human Interest Frame emotionalizes, dramatizes, and/or personalizes the issue being reported. It brings human face to the story (De Vreese, Semetko,

&       Valkenberg, 2000). The responsibility frame highlights how groups or individuals are held liable for generating problems or providing solutions to a specific issue.

There are two aspects of Framing, namely Frame Building and Frame Setting. There is still minimum attention given to Frame Building, specifically to the contributions of journalists in shaping news frames (Bruggman, 2014) of which conflict/war related frames are included.

**Review of Related Literature**

News is a window to the world (Tuchman, 1978). It is a social activity seminal work in the social construction of reality and the sociology of knowledge. She looks at news as a frame, how the organizations of news work and of newspapers are put together. Tuchman (1978) asks, "why are some events and issues news worthy but not others?"

The Mindanao conflict is fundamentally triggered more by the centralism of the state and inadequate democratic space that limits the self-governing power of the minorities, particularly Muslims in the southern Philippines. The contradiction between state's nation-building efforts and state-creation endeavors of the secessionist movement has sharpened the political violence in Mindanao. The tenacity and seriousness of the conflict remain complicated with the unremitting inability of the state to substantially and decisively address, over a long period, its core causes – insubstantial political autonomy, socio-economic grievances and deprivation, and perceived injustices, discrimination, and alienation of the people from the mainstream of Philippine political and economic development. The issue boils down to political and economic equity and social justice – the crux of the state responsibility and the kernel of the nation's spirit. Apart from re-engineering political institutions in Mindanao, there is a need to place emphasis on, at least at the local level: good governance, the rule of law, improved civil-military relations, accountability of public officials for corruption, and human

rights protection. These efforts would, to a large extent, facilitate the early conclusion of conflict, accelerate the process of peace, and find a respectable and honorable final peace agreement between contending forces.

Studies on the Moro issue in media is scanty, receiving limited attention from scholars. The Mindanao conflict is fundamentally triggered more by the centralism of the state and inadequate democratic space that limits self-governing power of the minorities, particularly of Muslims in the southern Philippines. The contradiction between state's nation-building efforts and state-creation endeavors of the secessionist movement has sharpened the political violence in Mindanao. The inability of the state to substantially and decisively address over a long period, its core causes–insubstantial political autonomy, socioeconomic grievances and deprivation, and perceived injustices, discrimination, and alienation of the people from the mainstream of

Philippine political and economic development. The issue boils down to political and economic equity and social justice. These efforts would, to a large extent, facilitate the early conclusion of conflict, accelerate the process of peace and find a respectable and honorable final peace agreement between contending forces (Buendia, 2015).

Tumawis (2005), in the study conducted by the World Bank, posits that the social and political exclusion of the Moro is exacerbated by the following factors related with *minoritization* and economic marginalization: Philippine history texts do not acknowledge the historic contributions of the Bangsamoro, and the biases and prejudices in media accounts and reports.

Anti-state groups in the Philippines, such as the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), desire the terrorist tag, due to the high-profile media coverage that follows and their intention to have their acts and movements get public attention. Discourse through portrayal is, thus, a tool for armed movements and a battleground (contested space) in contemporary conflicts. The purpose is to attain a victory of interpretation and ensure that a particular viewpoint triumphs. Certainly, in Mindanao, words are presented as of equal power to bombs.

Proposed solutions designed to maximize the prospects for the long sought-after Media led by the Philippine Press Institute and Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas (KBP), aided by UNESCO, academic institutes i.e. Center for Community Journalism, Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility, ought to give equal space to positive stories among

Muslims in Mindanao. This is for media to give space to victims and of rebel-military conflicts and civil society formations and work in the island. Notably, the covenant of the 2002 Mindanao Media Summit, entitled *This Is Our Mindanao*, states: "We want [to] reshape and redirect the themes on Mindanao currently dominated by terrorism, war criminality, and other forms of violence, to one that presents a realistic, balanced and truthful reporting of the lives, initiatives, relationships, issues, pains, dreams and triumphs of our people. We believe that ethnic and religious biases, the elitist framework of reportage that consistently gives voice to the powerful; the focus on events rather than on processes deter us from achieving our goal. " (Tumawis, 2005).

Professor Rufa Mae Guiam suggests those who report on the Mindanao Peace Process need to go back to the historical background of the Muslim-Christian conflict. They need to examine not only one source, but all possible sources of information about the circumstances that engendered the war in Southern Mindanao. Doing so will help the journalists ask sensitive and intelligent questions when they interview informants from both sides of the conflict. In addition, the journalist must read up on the various cultures of the thirteen Muslim ethno-linguistic groups, as no two groups are the same, even if some speak mutually intelligible languages. Similarly, regarding the terminology used, there is a need to be highly conscious of the distinctions of terms denoting religious identity and those used to refer to cultures or groups of people (Tumawis, 2005).

Reporters need to know when to use the name Muslim and cultural terminologies like Maguindanaon. More importantly, they should be careful when describing people who are criminal suspects, avoiding mentioning an individual's religion as this may serve to create more divisions in an already fragmented society. The media's vital role in promoting peace was recognized by the UNESCO. As proposed by the Assistant Director General for Information and Communication, "I am most convinced that media have an enormous capacity for not only bridging the gap between different cultures by sharing information and cultivating dialogue but also promoting mutual knowledge and better understanding in society." (UNESCO Assistant Director General for Information and Communication) Telling the truth about the "other" requires introspection and self-examinations of prejudices, biases and "moral frontiers (Braid & Tuazon, 1999).

**Research Methodology**

Berelson (1952) defined Content Analysis as a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication. Krippendorff (1980) redefined it as a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context.

Content Analysis has been the preference of this study because it helps uncover repetitive stories and patterns built among them. This also establishes the trend among the stories that this study tried to look for. Its coding process is also of help to minimize the level of subjectivity that may result from involvement of the researcher in the process.

Content Analysis is a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words or concepts within texts or set of texts defined broadly as books, book chapters, essays, interviews, discussions, newspaper headlines and articles, historical documents, speeches, essays, interviews, advertising, theater, informal conversations, or any occurrence of communicative language. To conduct a Content Analysis on any such text, the text is coded (broken down) into manageable categories on a variety of levels (word, phrase, sentence or theme) and then examined using one Content Analysis basic methods—Conceptual Analysis. Content Analysis may identify the intentions focused on communication trends of an individual, group or institution.

Conceptual Analysis is a category of content analysis that can be thought of as establishing the existence and frequency of concepts most often represented by words/phrases/in a text. A concept is chosen for examination, and the analysis involves quantifying and tallying its presence (thematic analysis). This focuses on looking at the occurrences of selected terms within text/texts (implicit or explicit terms).

The analysis begins with identifying research questions and choosing a sample. Once chosen, the text must be coded into manageable content categories. By reducing the text to categories, the researcher can focus and code for specific words or patterns that are indicative of the research question.

The stories were read and categorized. To establish credibility to the coding process, four coders followed a procedure, in which every coder was given stories to categorize. Pre-testing was also conducted to determine the level of commonality among the coders in order for any gap affecting the pattern of coding to be addressed.

Pre-Reliability Test

Reliability is the extent to which a definition, category, coding or measurement yields a consistent answer. In case of definition and formulation of categories, Reliability is applied by using ideas commonly employed by experts and previous researchers to ensure a general agreement on the application of the categories and definitions.

A brief orientation was given to the coders on the definitions attributed to the categories individually, in order to narrow down, if not eliminate, a gap in perceiving/understanding the news stories and establish commonly shared understanding among the coders A step-by-step guide was followed in determining and recording the precise unit of analysis. Four coders were chosen to do the coding for this study. The coding rules and guidelines were spelled out clearly, enabling the coders to share similar idea of what and how to categorize stories. The categories considered were the main aspects of the stories.

The four coders worked separately on the content analysis. Each of them determined the content of each news story to ensure the validity of the coding, using the following guidelines:

1. Read the story.

2. Enter the title/theme/topic on the appropriate column of the frequency table which contain the topic contexts.

3. Make sure to remember the definition for the categories.

4. Record the frequency.

5. Note the length of the story—number of paragraphs do not change much so long as the content remains the same.

6. In case there are different ideas, treat the dominant as the central/representative category. If the story consists of many paragraphs, the representation will be based on the most visible (dominant) theme.

7. Sum up all counts for each separate column per new category political/government, etc.

8. For each news story, compute the percentage given per category.

9.        For each column, compute the percentage given per category.


        A copy of the definition of concepts in each category were handed to the coders for checking, whenever the need arises. For each category, the percentage was computed. After establishing appropriate categories for content analysis, stories were classified thematically depending on the focus/theme of the story. All coders followed the guidelines. Each coding also underwent a reliability test.

        Reliability in coding was shaped by carefully laid out rules and guidelines to ensure that all coders follow the same procedure and, therefore, obtain consistent results. To facilitate this purpose, the coders were chosen based on level of education, knowledge of the subject, exposure to mass media and national affairs, and their ability to determine, clarify, and explain problem areas in the coding and content analysis. A preliminary content analysis was done to build a reliability test using randomly selected forty (40) news stories.

        From the preliminary analysis, the researcher found the coding discrepancies tiny and insignificant compared to the level of convergence among the coders. The researcher conducted brief discussion on the minor differences among the coders. Many of the coders (as shown in Table 1) showed as much as 100% agreement of judgment. The researcher discussed the source of difference to the coders. The preliminary analysis helped add objectivity as a reliability check, improved the coding rules, and enhanced the validity of the category system used.

        Measure of Reliability - the study used objective measure to compute the agreement of the coding process using:

1.        The coefficient of reliability (CR); and
2.        The index of inter-coder agreement (Scott's Pi)


        The Coefficient of Reliability is the relation of the coding agreement to the total number of coding decisions, which is a measure of the present agreement; thus,

CR=2(M)

N1=N2

M is the number of coding agreements between two coders 1 and 2 respectively.

The Scott's Pi checks the inter-coder agreement. It corrects not only the number of categories set but also probable frequency with which each is used.

The Scott's Pi =    -

When the observed agreement equals the coefficient of reliability, the expected agreement is the proportion of the items falling into each category set-pigeonholes and serves as a summary of the squares of those proportions. The results of pre-testing of inter-coder reliability test is shown below.

Table 1. Pre-Reliability Test Results

| Category | C-1 | C- 2 | % | C-2 | C-3 | % | C-3 | C-4 | % | Average |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Military/security | 20 | 19 | 95 | 19 | 20 | 95 | 20 | 20 | 100 | 96.6 |
| Politics/governance | 7 | 7 | 100 | 7 | 7 | 100 | 7 | 7 | 100 | 100 |
| Business/economy | 4 | 4 | 100 | 4 | 4 | 100 | 4 | 4 | 100 | 100 |
| Terrorism | 6 | 7 | 100 | 7 | 6 | 100 | 6 | 6 | 100 | 100 |
| Social/cultural | 2 | 2 | 100 | 2 | 2 | 100 | 2 | 2 | 100 | 100 |
| Legal | 1 | 1 | 100 | 1 | 1 | 100 | 1 | 1 | 100 | 100 |
| | | | | | | | | | | |

**Data Gathering**

The study determined how much coverage Philippine Daily Inquirer gave to the Moro issue and how it framed it. The study deployed textual/thematic approach to collect data exclusively generated from the first part, (Section-1 news) and the section on the 'Regions'. The news stories on Moro (Muslim Mindanao) were identified and selected for coding.

Four coders read the stories and categorized them into the different themes. This was followed by the test that determined the inter-coder reliability which established the level of reliability of the inter-coding—a vital tool that minimizes, if not totally extinguish, the level of

subjectivity, disturbing the authenticity of the study. The findings were then analyzed to get the results that answered the research question.

For this purpose, the researcher formulated a set of coding rules that will serve as a step-by-step guide in determining and recording the precise unit of analysis. Four coders were chosen to do the coding for this study. The coding rules and guidelines were spelled out clearly for the coders to share similar idea of what and how to categorize stories. The categories considered were the main aspects of the stories.

After establishing appropriate categories for content analysis, the stories were categorized thematically. In case a story included information that falls across several categories, the centrality (theme) of the story prevails.

Coders followed the guidelines. The coding also underwent reliability test. Categories considered had to be the main theme or summary of the different elements in the story. The categories that were deemed most basic/central were sufficient because they subsumed other possible aspects of the issue or event. In this study, the context unit is synonymous with the news story. Context, as the term implies, refers to the narration of the whole story. An item includes the essence of the whole story, since the unit of analysis is the story.

Pre-testing was also conducted to determine the level of commonality among the coders. This was intended to address any gap that may affect the pattern of coding. Few discrepancies were revealed, wherein some paragraphs appeared in the form of repetition were regarded as additional information that favored a certain category at the expense of the other.

Reliability in coding was shaped by carefully laid out rules and guidelines to ensure that all coders follow the same procedure and, therefore, obtain consistent results. The coders were chosen based on their knowledge and exposure to mass media and national affairs, and their ability to determine, clarify, and explain problem areas in the coding and content analysis. A preliminary content analysis was done to build a reliability test using randomly selected forty (40) news stories.

Measure of Reliability is the objective measure used to compute the agreement of the coding process. The coefficient of reliability is the relation of the coding agreement to the total number of coding decisions, which is a measure of the present agreement, thus,

C.R=2(M)

N1=N2

M is the number of coding agreements between two coders 1 and 2 respectively.

The Scott's Pi checks the inter-coder agreement. It corrects not only the number of categories set but also probable frequency with which each is used.

The Scott's Pi =

When the observed agreement equals the coefficient of reliability, the expected agreement is the proportion of the items falling into each category set-pigeonholes and serves as a summary of the squares of those proportions.

**Pre-Analysis Reliability Check**

The results of the pre-analysis reliability check showed that the percentage agreement or coefficient of reliability as well as the Scott's Pi values identified certain variations in their judgement (as shown in Table 2), but the variations were insignificant compared to the convergence in the content analysis. In fact, many of the coders in the table showed as much as 100% agreement of judgment.

The researcher instructed the coders to read The Philippine Daily Inquirer issues between June 2016 to December 2017, the period which the study covers. News stories on the issue were collected, read, and summarized into themes. The themes were organized into categories: military/security, politics/governance, social/cultural, business/economics, terrorism/crime, and legal.

The four coders worked separately on the content analysis and determined the content of each news story to ensure the validity of the coding by following the guidelines.

Then, they classified the stories into the given categories that represented different themes. This was followed by the pre-test conducted using forty (40) stories that determined the inter-coder reliability. This established the level of reliability of the inter-coding—a vital tool that helped minimize the level of subjectivity, which added to dependability of the data.

The news stories undergone content analysis following the techniques stated. They were tallied based on content category, then summed up. News stories for the study covered the period between June 2016 to December 2017. They were all sorted into conceptual categories of the study, such as politics/government, business/economy, military/security, social/cultural, terrorism, and legal. The established categorized stories were analyzed to retrieve results that helped in answering the research question.

**Table 2. Results of the Inter-Coder Reliability Test of all the 240 Stories (Data from PDI)**

| Category | C1 | C2 | % | C2 | C3 | % | C3 | C4 | % | Average |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Military/security | 120 | 120 | 100 | 120 | 120 | 100 | 120 | 120 | 100 | 100% |
| Politics/governance | 45 | 46 | 98% | 46 | 46 | 100 | 46 | 46 | 100 | 99% |
| Business/economics | 13 | 12 | 92.6 | 12 | 12 | 100 | 12 | 12 | 100 | 97% |
| Terrorism/crime | 30 | 30 | 100 | 30 | 30 | 100 | 30 | 30 | 100 | 100% |
| Social/cultural | 24 | 24 | 100 | 24 | 24 | 100 | 24 | 24 | 100 | 100% |
| Legal | 6 | 6 | 100 | 6 | 6 | 100 | 6 | 6 | 100 | 100% |

**Results/Discussion**

The news stories that covered the Moro/Muslim Mindanao issue in the Philippine Daily Inquirer amounted to two hundred ten (210). These news stories were categorized into six, namely: (1) defense/security, (2) politics/Governance, (3) terrorism/crime, (4) business/Economics, (5) social/cultural, and (6) legal.

Among the 210 news stories, 57% were into the category of defense/security. These included stories on: the AFP following rebels, the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) being under intense military attack, 10 battalions hunting ASG, AFP chasing ASG, bodies of ASG victims found, 3 terror suspects killed, ASG bandits killed in clashes, ASG neutralized, the AFP warns ASF "surrender and live", terrorists killed in AFP strikes, 20 soldiers wounded in clash with Maute, Moro youth group doubts ambush alleged by ASG and seeks probe, troops dislodge terrorists from Lanao town, ASG ambushed, fighting ends in Butig-freed—residents wait to return, MILF joins fight against Maute, 3 soldiers dead in Sulu, ASG leader nabbed from hospital, 3 soldiers killed in Marawi, Duterte sees end of Marawi siege by December, AFP claims Abdullah Maute dead, troops back MILF fighting against ISIS, Indonesians rescued from ASG,

there is no safe area in Marawi battle, only one Maute is still alive, MILF eyes more combat operation versus ISIS linked groups, some Maute fighters ready to give up, army captain killed in Marawi, 5 terrorists killed in Marawi clash, troops hunting terrorists, Marawi battle at its final stage, Maute escape route sealed off said the military, Moro rebels attack 3 army detachments (BIFF in Cotabato), 2 hostages joined ASG, Moro rebels storm jail and free 158 in Kidapawan City, leader of pro-ISIS terror group slain in Sarangani, Kidapawan City, AFP hunts remnants of terrorists, Drug Lord funded jailbreak in Kidapawan City, AFP hunts remnants of terrorists, Bombs on Abu and Maute falling, shun terrorists warns Moro rebels, police arrest Indonesian woman –Maute head's wife nabbed, Happilon's chief aide slain as troops loud struggles, Indonesian terror suspect in Marawi falls, Maute remnants regrouping in Lanao, military to assess Mindanao situation and security threats, foreign fighters seen in Cotabato City, airstrikes started against 13 Moro rebels in Maguindanao, war sound and Marawi mass hymns, 8 terrorists yield with 9 hostages, government renews 17 more hostages in Marawi, AFP said that hostages saw Maute leaders still alive, more slain Maute, Abu Sayyaf men recovered from battle zone, government fatalities in Marawi rise to 160, evacuees cannot go home if war in Marawi is over, heavy fighting rages on eve of deadline in Marawi, AFP sets deadline to end fighting in Marawi, Abu and Maute leaders are dead announced AFP, Marawi liberated but war was on-going, government warning of terrorist attacks, new Emir killed in latest fighting, war devastates Marawi, troops rescue hostages 21 in Marawi, last 30 terrorists holed up in building, rescued hostages bare abuses by ISIS, all is quiet in Marawi, 42 terrorists dead, ISIS influence spreading, life rebuilds in Marawi.

The second major category politics/governance had 46 news stories (40.6%), among which were MILF-MNLF factions pact, Abu Sayyaf has the desire to negotiate, MILF keeps optimum over peace talks live, president calls for peace in Western Mindanao in his first visit to Mindanao, Isabela, MILF joins government on war on drugs, Misuari safe passage to visit Duterte government – MILF to sit down, MILF joins government on war against drugs, comprehensive- agreement on Bangsamoro signed 2 years ago, BBL rejected, delivery of socio-economic development programs, MILF optimistic, Moro remember massacres under Marcos, MILF joins war on drugs, nabbed 30 suspects in Western Mindanao, Nur Misuari turns over 4 hostages, captives survived dozen clashes, Abu Sayyaf releases 2 more hostages, Misuari back from hiding, "peace process on track with MNLF on board" Duterte said, Bangsamoro Commission reconstructed, Bangsamoro transition commission to ask congress speed up, executive order signed for reconstructing Bangsamoro construction commission-reconstituted, Duterte visiting Marawi, military eyes talks with Maute, Palace leaves fate of Bangsamoro Bill to

congress, 59 Maute suspects ordered released, Islamic state had different mission in Mindanao, Bangsamoro bill be given priority, Maute group surrendered to government, 1974 Massacre of Malisbong carnage remembered, Martial Law declared dead, UN rights probers fear worse for Mindanao, Cardinal Tagle calling "let's all come together for Marawi victims", special session on BBL, MILF joins ARMM charter day, evacuees tracked back to Marawi City, Marawi children refuse to become Maute members, Marawi City mayor no need to sue government in international court, qualified informants to get reward on HAPILON, it's done-complete total victory-Marawi City.

The third major category was socio-cultural that had 24 stories comprising Ramadan Eid'l Fitr celebration, MILF wants joint-front with the government to fight drugs, ARMM governor, 'absence of leaders in communities breeds terror groups', residents of Marawi mark Eid Al Adha amid fighting, unidentified bodies from Marawi buried in Muslim cemetery, boots in mosque no disrespect, troops give haircuts to win hearts and minds, hostages freed, mothers see no hope to see kids, Marawi Grand Mosque to rise again, army gives civilians safety tips in bottles( plastic bottles with leaflets), digging graves for Marawi victims, Marawi starts long clean-up.

The fourth major category was Terrorism covered by 28 news stories that include Omar Mateen's activities, ASG beheading civilians, ASG seized 7 Indonesians, AFP confirmed the abduction of 11 Indonesians, ASG attacks and 2000 civilians flee, allegations linking ASG to ISIS, 5 Malaysians abducted near Tawi-Tawi, Abu beheaded teenage captive, terrorists raid Marawi jail, Abu Sayyaf bandits detonated bomb in Davao killing 14, wounding 68 and subsequent declaration of state of lawlessness, 2 women and a woman eyed in Davao bombing, Marawi students may be behind bombing, Duterte said that Abu wants to establish caliphate, ASG got peso 353 million ransom in the first six months, new MAUTE bomb uncovered in Maguindanao, joint Philippine-Malaysian against Abu Sayyaf eyed, civilian crisis looming due to Abu Sayyaf fighting, Abu Sayyaf kidnap German man in Tawi-Tawi, Abu Sayyaf snitches get cash rewards Php 5.9M to 2 informants, 2 top Abu Sayyaf leaders neutralized, Sultan Kudarat churches bombed, 3 Filipinos shot dead off Sabah, the mayor of Marawi killed, bomb in Cotabato City churches.

The news stories revolve mainly around the ASG common practices of kidnapping, negotiating, and accumulating finance in return, the Maute similar practices, few beheading and bombing. The news stories give neither the drive nor the endpoint of those involved in such

malpractices, the outlook they spouse, the methods they deploy in relation to the objective, if any.

The fifth major category was Business/Economics that was covered by fourteen

(14)      news stories comprised of the following: desperate Marawi evacuees sell relief good for cash, picture cards paint need to help Marawi, new houses for Marawi evacuees, modern city to rise from Marawi rubble with peso 38-86 billion, Philippines wins for Marawi rehabilitation, December 15 set for 600 temporary shelters in Marawi, key roads to Marawi cleared-AFP, oil spill hit farm in Mindanao, Marawi rebuilding to cost about 90 billion, 500 Marawi families to get new homes, 8 years after Maguindanao massacre, DSWD extends peso 682 million assistance to Marawi residents, Leni Robredo calls for unified action for Marawi, reparations for victims in Marawi, ISIS sent Php 1.5B to spread influence in Mindanao.

The coverage of business/economy is very much limited to most recent outbreak of war between the Maute group and the Philippine armed forces. Nearly daily coverage was given to the battle of Marawi where the AFP confronted the Maute – a non-stop fight until the AFP prevailed. The estimated cost for the reconstruction of Marawi is also indicated.

It is worth noting, however, that not much is in the news that enlightens the reader on the causes of the armed groups, their legitimacy/illegitimacy in the eyes of the public and any resistance or support or sympathy the public shows. The armed resistance is presented as mere trigger, but not as an extension of a political commitment.

The last category is on Legal matters that were covered in 6 stories: trial of Nur Misuari Supreme Court on the extension of Martial Law, 56 more abuse cases–illegal detention, Tawi-Tawi representative fined for SALN violations, ISIS lures youth with money, President Duterte sees legal barriers to draft BBL.

The category of legal stories is so scanty that it is hardly possible to make much more sense about it. It has, however, some of the legal matters that concern important personalities in Mindanao but not legal matters pertaining to the conflict or the forces engaged in the conflict.

## Discussion

The Philippine Daily Inquirer coverage on Moro/Muslim Mindanao covered six categories, namely business/economy, legal, military/security, politics/governance, social/cultural, and terrorism.

The Defense/Security took the highest (57%) coverage predominantly on the series of clashes between the different armed Muslim Mindanao groups confronting the Philippines armed forces. The stories are purely on the exchange of fire, the number of soldiers and Moro rebels killed and wounded. This coverage conveys the simple message that exchange of fire is the primary face of the struggle. The coverage does not add much to its stories, such as the issues that armed organizations spouse what the strategic objectives and the tactics they pursue; the progress or setbacks they go through and the prospects for peace, if any.

The newspaper coverage did not exceed the physical confrontation between the armed fighters where the common outcome is death and injury of the armed fighters, as well as, displacements of civilians and 'collateral damages'. This gives very little, if not nothing, about the political drives that pushed the people into armed struggle in lieu of political arena. The newspaper approach is none other than a reductionist. There are a couple of stories that call on the rebels to surrender as a resolution, which is zero-sum approach, where the decimation of the armed rebels is the only resolution of the conflict.

The second category is politics/governance, which covered 50 news stories (20.8%). Among the stories were the different attempts for peace (the rising and falling clues of optimism for peace in Mindanao) and cooperation (release of hostages), anti-drug between MILF and government, President Duterte's visit to Mindanao as a sign of close interest in making peace, the cooperation between the desire to negotiate and the prospects for peace, where Marawi children under the influence and resistance to the influence. Be it the mention of the President's visit, rise and fall of Maute, reconciliatory gesture of the MILF and MNLF, ISIS influence do not go beyond mere events.

The coverage published stories that were mere events, with no background and no insights into the story. The coverage was driven into covering the events as they come or happen, rather than contextualizing them into any context.

Socio-cultural category was covered with 24 news stories (10%) that highlighted the rituals of mere religious events, Moro-government social vices clearing, vacuum among the youth buried in Muslim cemetery, boots in mosque no disrespect, troops give haircuts to win hearts and minds, hostages freed, mothers see no hope to see kids, Marawi Grand Mosque to rise again, army gives civilians safety tips in bottles (plastic bottles with leaflets), digging graves for Marawi victims, Marawi City starts long clean-up business/economy.

## Conclusion

The Philippine Daily Inquirer coverage of the Moro/Muslim Mindanao question was reduced into mere military confrontations/skirmishes between the government and the insurgents that ended in counting the dead and wounded.

The coverage was reactive to events, mainly to the armed skirmishes, with no indication of the existence of any issue/question (social or political) that led to the on-going armed confrontation. There is no clue that the armed resistance is an extension of a political persuasion that was not attainable through non-violent means. The coverage reduces the conflict into mere military adventurism.

The military confrontations are widespread both by location and time, which makes it difficult to make any coherent picture of where the armed confrontation may lead, even more, what the military balance is.

The events are not contextualized. The Moro question that transformed itself from military approach to political process is not in the news coverage which takes away the essence of the Moro question: the political question.

The lion's share of the coverage on the skirmishes is mainly about the forces that have no centrality to the on-going process, such as the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters and Abu Sayyaf Group who have no share in the resolution of the issue.

The military conflicts are presented as series of events that have the look of routine without any cumulative effects.

The coverage does not relate the armed conflict to the political objective and the peace process. The successive agreements between Philippine government and the Moro, such as the 1976 Tripoli Agreement, did not contextualize the stories.

The MNLF and MILF are the official faces or fronts of the Moro question but most of the coverage on Muslim Mindanao is on ASG and, to some extent, on BBF (Bangsamoro Freedom Fighters) and the recent entrant, the Maute.

The Philippine Daily Inquirer, with all its access (through readership) to the intelligentsia, failed to convey and influence public perception because it gave no contextualized coverage on the Moro question.

## Recommendation

The study recommends the Moro question to be treated as a national issue, because a wound in a person is part of the person. The wound is never treated as an independent entity. The person is referred as 'the wounded person." The relationship between the Moro question and the Republic of the Philippines should be treated the same way the treatment is given to the 'wound' and 'the wounded.'

Resolution of the conflict should be highlighted as resolution of a national issue, but should never be treated as a relief to the Moros only. When Moros suffer, the whole nation suffers. The resolution of the issue is not only for the Moros but to the rest of the population too.

The media should locate the Moro issue as an integral part of nationhood or national development. It is evident that the Moros semi-feudal social structure kept the society stagnant. The treatment of Moro question, as part of Philippine Nation building/national development, can inspire more people to dream and work for peace. The structural change can be fertile ground for BBL to take root on and facilitate the realization of the common dream: peace and prosperity.

Comprehensiveness, contextualization, pro-activeness should be considered in covering the Moro issue for the public to develop appropriate perception of the issue, which is highly contributory to the constructive resolution of the issue. Public participation can make a difference in any referendum since referendum is public voice.

Responsible media coverage contributes to comprehensive and contextualized understanding of the issue that can help improve the impact on public perception; subsequently, public participation. This may also contribute to shaping peace, peace perspectives, and peace processes. To do so, media organizations, reporters in the field, and the newsroom should continuously be educated on their ethical obligations

to ensure that every issue covered gets what is due. The ethical awareness can elevate the quality of journalistic judgement that helps one to unglue from obsession with Manila-centric coverage and see the whole country with fairness.

The lack of fair coverage, the practice of treating an issue on the periphery nearly permanently, is reflective of ethical deficiency. It conveys unfair picture of a community or an issue. The public is fed with information that does not reflect the reality. This happens not always through addition but also via omission which is not, in essence, any different from other forms of misinformation. Ethics is not violated by addition and fabrication only, but by omission as well. Minimizing the coverage one deserves is unethical. As a result, the quantity and quality the audience gets turns into a blurred picture that raises more questions than answers. The findings of this study highlights that a major national security issue, taking place in a specific geographical and cultural location, is treated as peripheral. This trivializes people's lives, where a lot of property is damaged many properties, and many people are displaced. It is demeaning and undermining, especially to the future of the Philippines. This may be an outcome of Manila-based media obsessed with the center while losing sight of the periphery. The geographic periphery gets the attention, usually, when the stories are sensational.

The meagre coverage produced a micro-picture of the real world, which is not, in any way, different from misinforming the public.

Media ethical obligations, be it media organizations or journalists in the field or newsroom, should continuously be educated on the ethical implications of diminished coverage.

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