



THE PEARSON INSTITUTE

FOR THE STUDY AND RESOLUTION OF GLOBAL CONFLICTS

The Reverend Dr. Richard L. Pearson Annual Lecture
featuring

Miriam Coronel-Ferrer, Former Senior Mediation Adviser at the UN and Professor of Political Science at
the University of the Philippines

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Full Transcript

Katherine Baicker: Welcome, wherever you are in the world, and thank you for joining us. I'm Kate Baicker, Dean of the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago and I'm delighted to invite you to the Fourth Annual Reverend Dr. Richard L. Pearson Lecture. Each year this event provides us an opportunity to hear from peacemakers around the world about their experiences working to resolve some of the world's toughest policy problems and most enduring conflict. The Reverend Dr. Richard L. Pearson Lecture is held annually by the Pearson Institute for the Study and Resolution of Global Conflicts. The Pearson Institute was founded in 2015 and is led by our own world-renowned James A. Robinson. The mission of the Pearson Institute is to promote the ongoing discussion, understanding, and resolution of global conflicts through research, education, and engagement.

Like the rest of the university and the rest of the world, the Pearson Institute has had to adapt to our new covid-19 reality. Tonight's lecture is an example of that, with more coming to us around the world. This is a challenging change for us to make but brings an opportunity to gather people from very different places and to hear voices that might not otherwise be able to participate. This year alone, we've heard from people working on the ground to solve policy issues related to conflict in Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Colombia, and Syria, just to name a few. Incorporating these voices very much enriches our opportunities and our discussions and has been vital to understanding the University of Chicago and beyond.

Today, we continue that tradition with a distinguished speaker coming to us from Manila. Miriam Coronel-Ferrer served as Chief Negotiator for the Philippine government in the peace talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in 2012. I'm very much looking forward to hearing her remarks and I'd like to introduce Sonnet Frisbie to offer a few introductory remarks. Sonnet is a second-year MPP student at Harris and a Pearson Fellow. As a career member of the United States Foreign Service, Sonnet has served in diverse places from Mexico to Poland to the Czech Republic to Iraq. Following her time with us here at the Harris School, she will work as a financial economist in the State Department's Office of Monetary Affairs. As both a diplomat and a graduate student, I know Sonnet has a deep appreciation for the meticulous sustained efforts that were necessary for the type of transformational resolution brought about by tonight's distinguished speakers. I'm very much looking forward to hearing them both. Welcome, Sonnet.

Sonnet Frisbie: Wow, it's very humbling for me to be on the virtual stage today with illustrious colleagues such as Professor James A. Robinson, of course, our honored guest, Professor Miriam Coronel-Ferrer, and also Harris's own Dean Baicker. Thank you so much for that kind introduction. Coming back to the school in the middle of my career in foreign policy, I knew I would gain important technical skills such as statistical



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programming and would learn about the theoretical frontiers of policy. What I did not fully appreciate, however, was the positive impact of cross-pollination between academic and practitioners. The Pearson Institute and its programming has been a huge part of this experience, whether in person or over Zoom, at structured roundtables or through interviews through our student-run podcast, Rooms of Conflict, the Institute's programming has helped me and the other Pearson fellows draft a blueprint of how we will use our new tools to build better international policy. My colleagues and I have had the opportunity to meet and discuss with amazing individuals striving for peace, in conflicts ranging from the jungles of Colombia to the streets of America's inner cities. Each conflict is unique and has its own challenges, but all of the people working for peace have echoed what Professor Coronel-Ferrer said in a June 2020 interview, "Negotiations are never easy, and implementation is even more difficult." And she should know.

Miriam Coronel-Ferrer served as the Chief Negotiator for the Philippines government in the Mindanao peace talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in 2012. Signing a comprehensive agreement on the Bangsamoro in 2014, she became the first female negotiator in the world to sign a final peace accord with a rebel group. She also supervised the first two years of implementing the accord. In what she later called an undiplomatic moment, Madeline Albright said, "There's a special place in hell reserved for women who don't help other women." I think we can say Professor Coronel-Ferrer is safe from that particular fate. Not only did she pave the way for women to be included at the table in high-level peace talks by serving as Chief Negotiator, but long before she was negotiating peace, she was an activist helping draft the Philippines National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security. In 2015, she received the Hillary Clinton Award for Women, Peace and Security given by Georgetown University. Professor Coronel-Ferrer served on the U.N. Standby team of senior mediators from 2018 through early 2021. In this capacity, she was deployed to support the U.N.'s work in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo, Maldives and the [...] region. Currently, she is a University Professor at the University of the Philippines and has published articles on comparative governments and politics in Southeast Asia, peace processes, civil society and democratization.

Before welcoming Professor Coronel-Ferrer would like to welcome Professor James A. Robinson to make brief remarks. Professor Robinson is the Pearson Institute Director and the Reverend Dr. Richard L. Pearson Professor of Global Conflict Studies, and University Professor at the University of Chicago. Please join me in welcoming Professor Robinson.

James Robinson: Thank you very much. Welcome to this year's Pearson Lecture. When the Institute was started, and when I came on board as the Inaugural Director, we conceived of having an annual lecture. We're academics, students, teachers, researchers, sort of the bread and butter of the Pearson Institute, but engaging with the outside world and with the policy world, and in particular, with people who have been involved in conflict resolution and negotiation, that has always been a part of our agenda. So, we've conceived this lecture to be the focal point of that, where we can invite very prominent people who have been involved in negotiations, successful and unsuccessful. I want to talk about successful and unsuccessful negotiations after Professor Coronel-Ferrer's lecture, because of my experience in the Colombian case or maybe in the Northern Island cases. There's a big success, but success always comes along with failure and challenges, and peace is a work in progress all the time, it seems to me. That's



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something we learned from the Colombian and Northern Island and Palestinian cases, and we're just particularly honored to have Professor Coronel-Ferrer here today because of her role in the peace negotiations in Mindanao and the creation of the Bangsamoro agreement, and I think this is a success story, one of the big success stories, and we could say last year, we didn't have a success story. But I think as a researcher, I often learn as much from many failed research projects. You never see the failed research projects. You only see the research projects that succeed, because you can't publish the research projects that fail. But you learn as much intellectually from things that fail as things that succeed, and I think the same must be true of peace negotiations, but, of course, the stakes are much higher than in academic research.

So, without further ado, I'll turn the stage over to Professor Coronel-Ferrer and then we'll have a discussion afterwards.

Miriam Coronel-Ferrer: Thank you very much, James. Indeed, I see this event as a continuation of the dialogue that we started several years ago starting with Sergio Jaramillo, Jonathan Powell, and Ambassador Zomlot, and what they said about the difficulties of negotiations really resonate with our experience and the lessons that they have learned. The need for brave, courageous, and strong leadership, the difficulty surrounding setting the agenda, doing the process, coming to the terms of the process to sign. All of these really are very much part of all peace processes. But for today, I thought I would take a different approach.

I'd like to use the approach of discourse analysis to bring to light the significance of discourses, what they mean to a conflict, and how they are certainly part of the problem, but also part of the solution. As we know, conflicts are fought with arms, but they're also fought with words. And these words, these symbols, are used to represent the conflicting ideas. These all make up discourse. So, I'm starting from the thesis that peace talks, peace negotiations, are an engagement that aims to transform the dominant discourse. It aims to transform the discourse that creates the division and dissension. All parties to conflict, we know, have joyful and sorrowful narratives. In protracted conflicts, like the one that we've had with our minority Muslim population in the south of the Philippines, that conflict has brought generations of setbacks in both private lives, individual lives, and also in the economic development of the region and in basically, the whole nation-building project that the Philippines had embarked way back in the beginning of the last century. So, this is not a small deal at all to be able to find that kind of convergence. Indeed, that is a challenge in most peace negotiations: to converge what are very divergent hostile discourses, and to change that and transform that from hostility to civility to more collaborative articulations that translate into acts that are reflective of a new relationship, a partnership, from enemies to being partners, and a discourse that brings together the different actors. So, from a very exclusive view of the world, of reality, to a more inclusive view of the reality.

Now, I would like to use this opportunity to take a look at first, the discourse of the state, the dominant discourse of the state and society, as well because society has, indeed, embedded much of the state discourse, and focus more on the Bangsamoro discourse. I'll explain more later what Bangsamoro all is



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about. Our agreement is called the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro. It was negotiated with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. I will conclude with a few words on how discourse actually builds on other discourses. Political negotiations, the field of negotiations, have developed their own vocabulary as well as discourses that are appropriated, misappropriated, and likewise, transformed.

One nation, one country, one flag. You hear that again and again. It uses a very engaging literary device called anaphora. Repetition of the same word in successive processes. In this instance, it produces a very strong conditioning message. The words presented are simple enough. One, undivided. Unity and an undivided whole. Nation, that notion of a people. Country, which is best expressed in terms of actual territory. And then the flag with all its emotional content, the colors, the symbols inside the flag, which represents the sovereignty that has been earned. Especially for colonized peoples, that flag has very strong emotional content because it represents that struggle that they had to undergo to be able to achieve the status of an independent nation state. Presidents use this again and again. Part bravado, yes, but also definitely part of the foundation for national security policy. And we can imagine the consequences that this has actually generated. Long-standing war, protracted conflicts, on-and-off peace negotiations. In our case, it depends from where you count. For Bangsamoro, the war has been going on for centuries but if you look at the conflict from the '70s, the Moro Islamic Front, it's been no less than 50 years, and negotiations have been spanning a long time, all in all, in 70 years.

This state discourse is very much imbedded in society. I remember, for instance, as part of the consultations that we'd be in, in many of the outlying provinces, mostly very close to the provinces where you have the Muslim majority population. So, most of these provinces have been populated by migrants, and they are not Muslim, but they still have a mixed population. It still feels significant, but minority Muslim population. And it is in these provinces that we actually find the most resistance to the political process, the greatest fear against what a negotiation and what the MILF can actually do to them, especially when they get to some formal political power. So, in one negotiation, in one consultation, a hostile member from the audience asks, why allow them to have the name Bangsamoro? Bangsa in Malay means nation. So, Moro, Moro nation. And that translates to Moro nation, and we are the Filipino nation. How can we acknowledge a Moro nation vis-a-vis the Filipino nation? He was against the name. I had to tell him: "Who are we to tell them they can't choose their own name? You can choose your nickname. You can choose to change your name. And that's part of your right. Your right to your own identity and how you label your identity." Lady Gaga chose that name. Maybe we don't agree with that name because Gaga in Filipino, it means silly and stupid, but certainly she's not. But it's her name, and she stood up for that name.

So, in another consultation, I was invited to a very hostile audience. The room was filled with other people and it was clearly a very partisan audience. The room was full of questions. "Why allow them to have their own flag, anthem, and symbol?" We were now processing the draft law that was put in place, a new autonomous region, and one provision said they would have their own flag and symbol. And we see again, that kind of fear being expressed. So I told them the bizarre scene I just witnessed before the program started, which was the bearing of the flag, the colors of the province, setting up the stage, everybody



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standing up with the governor, the patron, the governor, leading the singing, with a very stern face and booming voice, leading the singing of the provincial anthem, and the emblem of the province very firmly atop the podium. I told them, "Isn't that what you just showed us, your flag, your anthem, and symbol? If a province can have that, why can't a Bangsamoro region have that flag and symbol?" So, here you can see the dynamics that happen. And it's something that is firmly resistant. Any inch indicating some kind of giving away that "one nation, one flag, one country," really creates the kind of dissension, and it takes a lot of breaking up, that kind of mindframe takes a lot of breaking up

Now, let's go to the other side. Let's go to how eventually we were able to transform that discourse. The first sentence in the first document that put together the consensus points sometime in 2012 actually was precisely an acknowledgment of that Bangsamoro identity. It's a very simple sentence. It goes something like this. "The parties acknowledge the Bangsamoro identity and the legitimacy of the grievances of the Bangsamoro people." Very simple, but it meant a lot to them. When finally, we were able to sign the framework agreement on the Bangsamoro, and the president instantly called for a press conference, his speech certainly generated the kind of emotional response to the Bangsamoro community in that finally, their struggle was having that kind of stature, that legitimacy. And it was a very simple speech. President Aquino said, "This agreement serves a name that symbolizes and honors the struggles of our forebearers in Mindanao and celebrates the history and character of that part of the nation, and that name is Bangsamoro." Of course, discourse has to change by slowly, slowly building that kind of trust and confidence in a political process that will eventually end the armed conflict.

Let's take a look at the other side of the coin. Let's deconstruct Bangsamoro. The origin of the word Moro actually saw a series of appropriations. It started with Spanish-colonial rule when they found that when Magellan lost its way in these islands, and the Spanish regime started to bring in the friars, their soldiers, their adventurers into the country, they found that significant parts of the country in the South and all the way from Manila were actually already being led by Islamic battles. And they called them Moros, reminiscent of how they called the Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula that they were able to eventually reject or conquer. Dark-skinned Muslims are very much identified with the notion of Moro, and it had a negative connotation. It reflected pagans, being uncivilized, being not part of the mainstream, being fierce, being violent, all of these negative associations. And later on, it would be appropriated by the American regime, wherein the United States bought the Philippine Islands from Spain for a mere \$20 million U.S. dollars and established its own governance, and more effectively, subduing the Moros in this region in this pacification drive, ultimately organizing around a system of what they called a Moro province.

So, there was an appropriation of Moro. And then eventually, that term was able to establish the foothold in that it brought together the different ethnic groups – because this is not one ethnic group, they have several languages and different ethnicities and different property relations, if you move from one ethnic group to another – but there are commonalities in that they were Islamized and did not convert to Christianity under Spanish colonial rule or even Protestantism under American colonial rule. So Bangsamoro became the battle cry. It presented a very strong aspiration to have the right to self-



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determination. As one scholar put it, “This is the tale of two nations. Two nations struggling to coexist.” The peace agreement brought that kind of legitimacy. However, it doesn't mean that that notion of Bangsamoro, that lived reality for those people who self-identify, has no contestation within even the ethnic groups that make up the people framework. So, within the Bangsamoro, you do find that kind of ethnonationalism also being articulated, and this is particularly very strong on the island's part in Cebu. The people called the Tausûg, which translates to people of the sea currents, or people of the waves, there's that kind of ethnic nationalism, seeing themselves unique from the bigger Bangsamoro frame, and also somewhat detached, because they're in the islands, while the seat of power now of the Bangsamoro autonomous government is in the mainland part of Mindanao. That is something they are working out among themselves, to really build that kind of consensus around the Bangsamoro project.

But even more difficult particularly is the case of the non-Moro indigenous peoples because they also live there, but they don't identify as Bangsamoro. They're not Islamic. They have for the most part preserved their own cultural practices, and they also have the same fears of being a minority within this minority region. And that was very important for us during the negotiations, to ensure that they don't feel left behind, to feel that they have enough security guarantees. So, in the agreement and also in the law, you will find this reference to freedom of choice. Freedom of choice as to identity. Bangsamoro is a right to identify as such. If you descended from the region of the inhabitants in this part of the country, it's a freedom of choice. You may choose to be Bangsamoro or you may choose to be not, but you will still enjoy certainly the same rights, plus the same protection.

Customary law is also guaranteed. The practice of customary law is also guaranteed. What became particularly problematic was the concept of ancestral domain, because what we find interesting here is that the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, building on their own discourse throughout the decades of struggle, incorporated the newer discourse of indigenous peoples. So, you can see, imagine being born in the '70s, anticolonial struggles, third-world movement. That was the concept of the homeland being recovered. By the '80s, '90s, the international discourse was focused on the rights of indigenous communities, eventually being called indigenous peoples. And that they appropriated, and now they started to refer to their homeland place as their ancestral domain, Bangsamoro as their ancestral domain. That's deriving from another body of rights, to be able to claim the right to self-determination. And that is problematic because the other indigenous communities had the same right precisely to ancestral domain. It's acknowledged in our national law, native title is something acknowledged in national law, and there's a procedure to be able to acquire a certificate of ancestral domain, and they haven't been able to do that, and now they really fear that with the language of ancestral domain, getting into the Bangsamoro discourse, that their own rights to their own ancestral domain would be subordinated.

So, in the negotiations, we had to deal with these fears. You will find now, in the agreement, a statement that goes like this. “Vested property rights shall be respected,” and that's an assurance that native title shall be respected, along, with the private properties that have now taken over on the basis of the current cycle that was instituted under the colonial regime of all settlers that come in so long as it can be proven that these were acquired not through fraud or force. So, assurances, being able to assuage the fears of



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the other communities that are generated precisely because of the appropriation of ancestral domain discourse by the main protagonist, in this case, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, it had to be truly addressed. Before we signed the agreement, we had the courtesy call before the president, President Aquino, and one of the messages that he imparted to them goes something like this: “I presume that having been oppressed, you will not oppress other people.”

So that was a message particularly directed to protect the interests of the other indigenous communities who do not identify as Bangsamoro. Then they let themselves talk about these two legends, a very popular legend in this part of the country, the legend of two brothers way back in history, who, one brother converted to Islam, the other brother choosing to keep their indigenous belief system. That brother chose to go upland, uphill, while the brother who converted to Islam stayed in the coastal areas, at the foot of the mountains. And that's, in fact, where the conversion to Islam happened. So, through the shores of Muslim traders, Muslim missionaries, not through armies actually, the way Spanish-American colonial rule happened, and that gradual conversion happened throughout the century. But one brother stayed at port. And the message was: we are brothers, we will not oppress you. But again, we need to see that. We need to see that precisely, on the very core issue of ancestral domain, that the acknowledgment of the right to ancestral domain of the non-Moro indigenous peoples would be affected.

Now, let me go now to the last part of my presentation today. I hope you're still here with me. I'll just elaborate a little bit on how discourses build on certain discourses, and how we see that in political negotiations happening.

So actually, the government panel and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front had a lot of opportunity, as far as the assistance from the international community, to go and see and talk to other peace processes that have happened before us. It does seem that the Northern Island process had a very strong impact on the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, precisely because now they started to use some of the language that you will find in the process or also imbedded in their agreement. For instance, some of the terms like normalization. Normalization meaning being able to move from a war context to a normal context which emphasizes that war is not normal. You cannot assume that it's part of your daily life. So, in this annex, for instance, that we signed on the annex for normalization, that includes a security component, but also the transitional justice and reconciliation, but also the element of what they would not call, in U.N. lingo, “disarmament, demobilization and reintegration.” They had a particular aversion to the concept of what is commonly known as DDR. And what they proposed precisely in the Northern Island agreement was decommissioning and putting beyond use the weapons and the combatants of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. So, to put beyond use, not to surrender the arms, which is an expression of defeat, rather than a mutually shared victory, but rather because there's no need for war, to put this beyond use.

There is one particularly interesting term in the Northern Island process that they liked a lot, and that is the term parity of esteem. In the 1990s, the Standing Human Rights commission in the U.K. said war shall be done to guarantee the equal treatment and esteem of both traditions, and in that case, it was the political-religious community of the unionists and the republicans, Protestants and Catholics. In this case,



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it's the Filipino and the Moro population. So then at one point, the state secretary for Northern Ireland said that each settlement must be accorded parity of esteem, and they were pushing for the parity of esteem. They actually wanted it in the text, in our agreement, but it wasn't applied anymore. Here, I will show you a concept that they really failed to resonate with them, but how we were able to use a term to move forward our agenda of a gender-responsive peace agreement.

We were discussing what reiteration of rights should be fully acknowledged with a particular focus on certain things. And we wanted the right to meaningful political participation of women to be there in the text, but there was a very long discussion about why we needed to put the word "meaningful" to qualify political participation. One way for them to appreciate the significance of the word meaningful was not only to say that meaningful is the opposite of meaningless, which is easy enough to understand, but to also use their language that they appropriated, of parity of esteem, to say, "You would want the parity of esteem between the Filipino majority and the Muslim population. Now, there is also that important aspect of piety of esteem and that is the piety of esteem between the Bangsamoro women and the Bangsamoro men, and women in general, in our society." It was hard to backtrack from that, from their own appropriation of a concept, and "meaningful" stayed inside the text.

So, I will conclude now by saying that yes, political negotiations are really about deconstructing each other's discourses, finding convergence, producing, modifying, enhancing or maybe creating a different discourse altogether. All articulations that provide what is sufficient because you can't have complete justice and also generate the sufficient consensus to be able to sustain the support among the public, because not just between the states, and the parties engaging in the negotiations, the public cannot be left behind in this kind of appreciation of a more inclusive discourse, and discourse in a political framework or perspective. It certainly provides that philosophical frame. In social movement theory, it's called reframing. Reframing of the mobilization discourses. So, it is something like that. But certainly it goes deeper into examining the symbols, the discourse and all the elements that make up discourse and finding the space for convergence, capturing within that convergence, the history of hurt, but also the kind of a dream for a shared future that will make possible one country, several nations, several flags, and end the armed conflict. Thank you very much.

James Robinson: Thank you very much. That was fantastic. One of the things which has been most fascinating for me as an academic who knows the academic literature on ego, peace, and how to get peace, and what causes conflict, is the deviation between the reality of these conflicts and the way many social scientists have portrayed them. And one thing which I notice about this discussion is this role of grievances and how you have to recognize the grievances of the other people. That's something that's common in all of these. It's common in the Colombian case. It's common in the Northern Ireland case. And sometimes, it's a failure to recognize grievances in the Israel/Palestinian conflict, which my impression is, that's one of the things that makes it so difficult to resolve it.

Let me start out by abusing my position as chairperson, by just asking one question which came up in the context of Jonathan Powell. Jonathan Powell talked about how he had to spend hours and hours and



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hours and hours talking to these Sinn Fein people about the history of exploitation, of oppression, of grievance, in order to get to a point where negotiation was possible. And I asked him, “Well, what about money?” Most social science about conflict is all about money. It's about how you share the resources. And in fact, social scientists would see an ideological conflict as being impossible to resolve, whereas if it's money, you can just also share. And he says nonetheless, that's completely wrong. If it's about money, there's never enough money. You can never agree on sharing money because there's always the possibility of more money. But principles, you can actually find a way of agreeing to respect other people's principles and find an institutional architecture where people's principles can be respected.

And so, he said that there's one exception to that: one of the problems in Northern Ireland, and this was also true in Colombia, was this existence of the war economy, that the conflict allowed contraband and illegality, and in the Colombia cases, it allowed this colossal drug economy. I was wondering, how would you react to that, this discussion of resources and money, and what Jonathan Powell called the war economy, was there a war economy, and was this a debate ever about resources or resource division?

Miriam Coronel-Ferrer: Of course, any conflict generates its own war economy. It's clearly shown in our case. It happens all around. For instance, the problem of legal firearms issued to the military actually being sold in the illegal market, and many of these arms just got reported as being lost and being taken away in an ambush, for instance, but actually, there was some selling going on. And that was part of really being able to reform the security sector and being able to discipline the security sector. Then, in this part of the country and practically everywhere, there is the big problem of drugs, drug smuggling, criminality, kidnapping, which are said to be the major industry because it generates a lot of ransom money. We know, of course, the problem with the practice of the Abu Sayyaf. So, all of these do happen, and have happened. Part of getting to terms with all of this complexity, the complexity of so many armed groups was being able to have mechanisms to deal with criminal groups through joint security cooperation and having mechanisms to disband all the other armed groups, because again, it would be hard for one armed group, like the MILF, the biggest and most organized, running about 30,000, to disband and find that their neighbors whether they are affiliated with the ISIS, Jemaah Islamiyah or the Abu Sayyaf, local criminal groups, politicians, or politician warlords, still have weapons, it would be very hard to voluntarily give up their arms.

But in our discussion, we were talking about autonomy. A lot of discussion has to do with the fiscal aspects of that autonomy. So, there was a lot of wrangling, certainly. What taxes will be devolved to the autonomous region? And that was very contentious, because when you get down to that technical side of it, it's very difficult to divide, say, estate taxes. Properties are spread all over. So, these are the complications that we had to deal with. Our resistant bureaucracy, who wanted to collect these taxes themselves, even though they were not actually collecting them sufficiently in a conflict area. And then that is part of being able to open it up. Then the question of share in natural resources, share in the wealth generated from mineral resources, they are very contentious issues. You saw this in [redacted] where the oil economy was a major bone of contention as to how much was to be retained within the region, how much of the revenues generated from the gas will be retained by the region. Now, there's no significant



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oil fine or gas fine yet in the region, but there's the prospect, and we inquired a lot about the prospect. Exactly who will be controlling the selection of the service contractor? They wanted to sit in the process. How much sharing will go to the region from mineral resources, the mining industry, and then also the fossil fuels, and then some very basic other resources, which are, in any case, effectively already devolved to the local governments, like sand and gravel.

So that was part of the long negotiation, having to deal with the elements of the fiscal economy ranging from taxes to shares in revenues to also the development assistance that would be given to the region, given the fact that they are the poorest in the country. So, we can't get away with the economic side of the problem.

James Robinson: You could get away from it, but it's interesting what you emphasize. I find it very interesting what you emphasized. Let me ask some questions which are coming from the audience. So, one question we have is, "Do you think that the three-year extension of the transition period requested by the Bangsamoro government should be permitted in order to fully complete the transition?"

Miriam Coronel-Ferrer: It's very difficult for me to make a definite stand for that. But what I can see are certain advantages, especially because of the destruction created by covid. Just imagine the situation of the MILF panel chair, my counterpart, he's now the Minister of Education in Bangsamoro region. All schooling now being online, and what are the facilities there? School buildings themselves are already under-resourced, now need these technologies, the I.T. system to be put in place a very short time, and then to be able to bring around your whole educational system to the new mode, so that, again, the children are not left behind because of this pandemic, not only, because of the war, but now because of this pandemic. These are really serious challenges.

And they do have to pass several laws, very important, with long-term consequences like the election law. The election law will determine how power will be shared within the Bangsamoro assembly. And they still haven't really got it. They are discussing it, but there's a lot of consensus building that has to be done. On the other hand, there's my fear that the MILF will become so enamored and entrenched in the position that they become exclusivists, that they now prioritize again protecting their own ranks, protecting their own interests at the expense of the broader population. So, they do have to be reminded, depending on where Congress goes on this, and apparently Congress is on the side of expansion because of the very strong influence of the president. You would need to put all of these measures in place. You don't want it to go the way of the FMLN or the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, where they stayed too long in power, became a dictatorship, and now are fighting their own people just to stay in power. Although the Nicaraguan experience provides a good experience, they lost in the first election, and then were able to win subsequently. So, there are risks that you have to take, right. You strengthen your own political party and then risk losing the election and then make a comeback. That's not the end of the process. That's not the end of the struggle. It means being able to continue to consolidate your ranks and be able to play the new game of electoral politics.



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James Robinson: Yeah, the Sandinistas reinvented themselves. It didn't end up wholly well. You mentioned the president. And I think this is something that's fascinated me, that President Duterte is the first president in the history of the Philippines. Is it good to have somebody from Mindanao as president? He must understand the issues better than somebody from Luzon.

Miriam Coronel-Ferrer: Well, President Aquino was from Luzon and he understood this issue. He played a role in bringing the bureaucracy over to some of the provisions that we actually had to negotiate on, practically every aspect of the bureaucracy. Now, Mindanao itself is a contested place, because of the fact that it's made up of a kind of complexity. You have the big migrant population taking over most of the provinces, and also the political machineries over there in the last 100 years, starting from American colonial rule. And then different identities that are also sprouting. There's a Mindanao identity framed around a three-people approach, meaning the Moro, Non-Moros and the migrant community, which technically are no longer migrants since they've been there several generations now.

But in any case, what does it mean to have the first president of the country coming from Mindanao? Certainly, in this instance, it's not necessarily the case, that anybody coming from Mindanao would have this kind of framing, because in our surveys that we did in the course of the peace negotiations, what we found was that the other Mindanoans, the non-Bangsamoran Mindanoans, are most opposed to the political process. The threat is in their neighborhood, in their backyard, and they would challenge us saying, "Are you going to live here with us? Are you going to suffer the consequences of what you're coming up with?" pointing to the fact that I'm from Luzon. So that kind of thing. But in the case of President Duterte, I think he had enough pragmatism to know he cannot find a war in so many fronts, especially now that he's fighting the communist front viciously, and now we have the pandemic where we are seeing significant deficiency in governance.

James Robinson: Okay, yeah, it's complicated. Let me ask you another question from our audience who are listening. Somebody asks, "What was the media coverage like during the negotiation process, and do you think this helped or hindered the negotiations?"

Miriam Coronel-Ferrer: There's the typical difficult ebb and flow in the coverage. Popular opinion is very (...). It doesn't mean that you shouldn't be listening to popular opinion, but you should not inform your policy solely on public opinion.

And unfortunately, a lot of politicians do that, so they swing around the public opinion. In key moments of violence, we see that kind of uproar. Because in negotiating, in a hold process, there will be violence. There will be eruptions of violence, and that's something you need to manage, how the public is reacting to that violence and calling for a return to war. Why are we conceding so much? Look, they are not believing. Their commanders are doing this in this one area. And on the other hand, there is their own constituency protesting that there are soldiers messing up in our region. I thought we were in a cease fire. We would hear complaints on both sides, so that kind of thing would be picked up by the media, and we know that the support for the process would ebb and flow with how public opinion is standing on this



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issue. And certainly, it mattered a lot, especially during election time because politicians would stake their claim on a policy, depending on what's popular at the moment during election time, and that's how we lost the battle to pass the law during the term of President Aquino in 2016. It was passed much later on in 2018 particularly because of a violent incident that happened, and really impacted the public reception and the process, and social media was an issue.

And in social media, before there was the concept of fake news, we suffered from that. We had to fight the fire that was being generated by misinformation. And looking at the interactive website, as a female negotiator, I suffered a lot of sexism, people saying that I am a woman, I am a weak negotiator, and I can't be trusted because I will sell the country. That happens in social media. Maybe print media would be more circumspect, and we did have some very supportive media, especially those who really follow through the process who would stake out outside of the negotiating room in Kuala Lumpur, spend a lot of time really sustaining the story. And that is important, to keep that story in the national agenda because if you put it in the back pages, it loses that kind of urgency. So, I mean it's a two-fold thing, right. Just most anything. Media can either be a bane or a boom to the process.

James Robinson: I think we have time for one more question. Let me read it out here. "After President Estrada broke the ceasefire that the Ramos administration had brokered, and enacted a policy of intensifying the conflict against the MILF, what had to be done to regain the trust and convey that the intentions of peace were genuine in the aftermath of that campaign?" I don't know if that's a fair characterization of the event.

Miriam Coronel-Ferrer: It was a major war that broke the ceasefire and the political process. When President Estrada, using the slogan "One country, one flag, one nation," actually, because of the influence of his defense secretary, waged another round of war. I think in the end, I have to give it to the MILF. They were finding a way out of the conflict. There was already the kind of paradigm shift in their own struggle, when the leader Hashim Salamat kept saying we have to find the most civilized way of resolving this conflict.

We know that the struggle lost the presidency after three years through people's power, second round of people in power, and renegotiations, a resumption of the talks were opened up by President Arroyo at the time. There was an openness, but they wanted guarantees. That's when the time happened when normalization in the previous talks necessitated bringing over the third parties. Malaysia as the facilitator eventually, and then also an international monitoring team to support the cease fire. They wanted those kinds of guarantees, although, of course, these are not 100 percent guarantees, because only the parties can give the kind of guarantee to a process, but otherwise, it also came with negotiation over certain modifications on the process.

And also, the agenda was redefined. So that happened every time. Every time there was serious conflict going on, there was a new negotiation, a negotiation for us, and additional mechanisms to be able to strengthen the ceasefire, which was very important to keep the cease fire in place.



James Robinson: That's interesting, the role of these outsiders. I think Sergio Jaramillo talked in Colombia about the important role that the Norwegians and the Cubans played in building trust and the ability of the process. So that's interesting you had mentioned that. I think we have to come to a close now, unfortunately. I'm just finding that absolutely fascinating and it's such a triumph for the Philippines what's happened. There's always challenges. I think when you can pull off something as remarkable as what's happened with Bangsamoro, it's a kind of testament to the ability of humans to collaborate and build this framing and the meaning they attach to certain phrases. That's also very thought-provoking. So, I think we learned a lot. I certainly did, and we are very honored to have you here. Thank you all very much for joining us here today. Of course, it's not today in Manila, it's tomorrow in Manila, but you see what I mean. Thank you, yes.

Miriam Coronel-Ferrer: Thank you.