Meaning-Making in Mindanao

Everyday Violence, Ordinary People, Finding Peace
Meaning Making in Mindanao
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Meaning-Making in Mindanao is a collection of struggles and hopes.

The struggles are retold in the stories that trace the historical roots of the Mindanao conflict and the everyday experiences of violence and poverty. They are diverse stories of a people who struggle for their identities and way of life to be valued and respected by others, be they Muslims or Christians, be they Tausugs, Bisayas, or Badjaos.

In this collection of stories, the diverse meanings of Bangsamoro for Muslims, Christians, and Badjaos are surfaced. A deeper examination of poverty reveals its many meanings for the people of Jolo. Ordinary women and men define violence. Muslims and Christians from Cotabato share their views on the MOA-AD. Stereotypes of Tausugs, Bisayas, and Badjaos are re-examined. Residents’ views on the Balikatan are explored. Christians, Muslims, and Badjaos share their unique understanding of peace. Muslim and Christian leaders re-tell their people’s accounts of the history of the conflict in Mindanao.

These stories as told by the ordinary people of Mindanao are based on empirical studies conducted through a collaborative research process between Christian and Muslim peace researchers. Each study went through the rigors of research, applying a social psychological lens and ensuring sound research methodology. The studies on Bangsamoro, poverty, violence, peace, and conflict used the lens of Social Representations Theory which looks at how groups of people give meaning to phenomena through social interaction. Each group creates their own understanding of the different social issues they experience in their own cultural, historical, and social worlds. As such, there is a multiplicity of meanings or social representations to the same object or phenomenon. The studies on the MOA-AD, the Balikatan, and stereotypes of Tausugs, Bisayas, and Badjaos, on the other hand, used the concept of attitude and examined why people’s views or evaluations of these and each other may be positive or negative.

In this collection of ordinary people’s accounts of living in the midst of the conflict in Mindanao, we see how each group of people makes sense of their everyday lives.

It is in surfacing this multiplicity of meanings that we find the implications to diverse pathways towards achieving peace. These stories of hope are sought not necessarily through finding commonalities but through the unpacking of these differences. It is through a deliberate and deep understanding of these differences that we are able to recognize the specific and unique paths to peacebuilding.

As the country marks the accomplishment of the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (2012), we recognize the need to understand the struggles and hopes of the diverse peoples of Mindanao. We hope to make this collection of stories our small contribution to peace.

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