

Crisis and Cohabitation: Christian–Muslim Relations, Displacement Dynamics, and the Contested Role of Social Media After the Marawi Siege

¹Meriam M. Arao,²Diamond Tawano- Macarimbang

¹La Salle University-Ozamiz City

²Mindanao State University- Main Campus

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ABSTRACT

The 2017 Marawi Siege marked a pivotal event in the history of Mindanao, profoundly impacting ChristianMuslim relations, displacement dynamics, and the role of social media in post-conflict recovery. This study examines the complex intersection of these factors in Iligan City, which served as a primary host community for internally displaced persons (IDPs) during the siege. It investigates how the crisis shaped interfaith relations, humanitarian efforts, and the contested role of social media in both fostering and hindering recovery. The research addresses three key questions: How did host-community dynamics and resource pressures influence Christian-Muslim relations during displacement? What forms of interfaith dialogue emerged post-siege, and how did they confront historical and structural barriers? How did social media function as a contested space for information, grievance, and reconciliation? Through a qualitative synthesis and thematic analysis of diverse sources, the study explores the ways in which solidarity and tension coexisted within the host community, the evolving peacebuilding efforts, and the ambivalent role of digital platforms in shaping public discourse. The findings suggest that while Iligan City witnessed spontaneous acts of protection and interfaith cooperation, these were often overshadowed by resource scarcity, suspicion, and misinformation. The role of social media as both a tool for dialogue and a vehicle for polarization underscored the challenges of fostering trust in the aftermath of violence. The paper concludes by proposing a comprehensive framework for post-conflict recovery that integrates material support, interfaith dialogue, and digital literacy, offering insights into the ongoing pursuit of sustainable peace in multi-religious societies.

INTRODUCTION

The 2017 Marawi Siege was an important event in Mindanao history with impacts on Christian-Muslim relations, displacement, and social media recovery, among others. This study has explored the relationship between the internally displaced persons (IDP) and the past host community which is Iligan City during the siege. An examination of crisis impact upon relations between religious communities, volunteer groups, and the debate over social media as a support or obstacle to recovery. The research asks three questions. How did the hostcommunity dynamics and resource pressures impact Christian-Muslim relations during displacement? What types of interfaith dialogue emerged after the siege, and how did they deal with historical and structural barriers? How did social media serve as a battleground for information, grievance, and reconciliation?

The study employs a qualitative synthesis and thematic analysis of various sources of information to examine the divergent ways that solidarity and tension co-existed in the host community, the evolving peacebuilding efforts and the ambiguous ways in which digital media shaped public discourse. The study suggests that spontaneous protection and interfaith mobilisation in Iligan City were undermined by the scarcity of resources, suspicions, and misinformation. The use of social media as a means of communication and a means of polarization highlights the challenge of building trust in the aftermath of violent events. The paper ends with a framework for post-conflict recovery composed of material assistance, inter-faith dialogue, and digital literacy. It illustrates the continuous search for sustainable peace in multireligious societies. Introduction The Marawi Siege in 2017 was a watershed moment in contemporary Mindanao history. Harsh clashes between Filipino

security forces and ISIS-linked militants in the city of Marawi destroyed the city. So there was heavy civilian damage and a massive internal dislocation.

Iligan City, or merely a few kilometers away from Marawi, was the major host community of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs). But IDPs and host communities were caught in a web of mitigation, blame, and suspicion. Research on displacement and social cohesion illustrate that crisis exposes and shapes relational infrastructures. While it shows the underlying solidarity of many people, it also creates competition for limited resources. As for the Marawi case, there are documented instances of cross-faith rescue and protection and other accounts of suspicion and unequal help. In the same manner, a battleground for information and aid sharing could have protagonist groups which infiltrated social media. Much unverified material and grievance narratives induce fear and also reinforce negative stereotypes associating Islam with terrorism. There has been an influx of papers, reports, and discussion on the Marawi Siege and its security, reconstruction, and IDP return consequences. There is not enough attention on Iligan as the host community, rather than Marawi as the focal point of conflict. Not much focus has been spent on how Christian-Muslim relations offline, humanitarian governance and digital communication salaries are entwined to shape post-siege recovery process. Research studies usually assess these domains in isolation. Displacement management, interfaith dialogue, and social media/violent extremism are usually assessed in silos. This paper has come to an intellectual life to strengthen inclusive, peaceful coexistence in a multi-religious world. It created a comprehensive recovery strategy to utilize a connection between interfaith dialogue and digital literacy. A mutually reinforcing pillar of sustainable peace. This study combines information from 2017–2025 to ask three questions:

1. How did hostage-community pressures impact Christian-Muslim relations during the displacement in Iligan City?
2. What kinds of interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding emerged in the post-siege period to deal with historical and structural barriers?
3. In what way was social media a contested space for information, grievance, and reconciliation after the siege?

This paper will use a desk-based qualitative synthesis and thematic analysis to produce an empirically grounded, multi-scalar account to shape academic and policy thinking about post-war recovery.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses desk-based qualitative synthesis or systematic case study methodology on Iligan City, one of the main host communities of IDPs during the 2017 Marawi Siege. This approach may not collect primary data but makes use of secondary data through a systematic application of thematic analysis. It advocates for systematic review of documentation instead of narrative review. A case study design looks for one bounded case, post-siege recovering and the triangulation exercise across source types adds validity.

The timeline relate to immediate post-siege responses and longer-term recoveries which are produced from 2017 to 2025. Sources that were addressed directly to Iligan City, or that compared the displacements in Mindanao were utilized as frames. The documents were coded using open coding. So, the segments dealing with core themes were labelled descriptively. Protection, hospitality, mistrust, aid distribution, dialogue, misinformation, digital mobilization. The transcripts of the interviews were the basis of the codes. The researcher grouped some codes together to represent broader patterns.

- Host-community solidarity and strain;
- Ways to keep a Interfaith dialogue going.
- Social media is a good and bad thing.

FINDINGS

Host-community dynamics and hospitality

As the primary host city for internally displaced persons (IDPs) as a result of the Marawi Siege, Iligan was a key site of crisis. This development is widely regarded as a watershed moment for Christian–Muslim relations within Iligan City. According to Amnesty International (2017), Christians were targeted by the Maute group and some Christians were forced to wear hijab and recite Muslim prayers to evade capture. Iligan City was among the major host communities for war-displaced people just meters away in the battlefield.

Most IDPs arrived unprepared as they fled without essential items or valuables. It was a challenge for Muslims as well as Christians to transport to a secure community. People in Marawi City shared similar risks and losses, regardless of faith. Many of the residents helped each other to evacuate even though they were not of the same religion. According to Zaimov (2017), Muslims offered protection to Christians from the Maute group until they reached IDP-hosting safer areas.

Claro (2017) tells the story of when Farida, a Muslim store owner, boldly protected her thirteen male employees, mostly Christian migrants. She declared, “You have to kill me first before you touch them.” After, she facilitated their prompt evacuation by boat, crossing Lake Lanao to Iligan City with her uncle’s help. Similarly, Zaynab, a humanitarian worker, shared the same conviction in protecting Christians and would rather die than allow terrorists to harm their Christian brethren. International Alert, in a documentary commemorating the siege, illuminated such uncelebrated heroes. It recalled that there were Muslims who chose to die for others, even if that meant being tagged by government troops as a Maute supporter. When evacuees were taken to host communities, there was a spirit of bayanihan where food and water was placed on the road for evacuees to take and eat regardless of religion (Eviota-Rivera et al., 2023). Iligan City offered IDPs hope as it gave hospitality by welcoming them and allowing for a temporary shelter such as evacuation centres. Nonetheless, some IDPs chose to stay with relatives and not avail themselves of the facilities. Evacuees who fled Maute fought Brgy. Basak also experienced terror. As they moved in and were suddenly attacked by other evacuees. This happened because some of the Basak residents were suspicious that Muslim IDPs might be Maute sympathizers. They fear that they might be housing members of the Maute group who stayed in the spilling out of Marawi. The Maute group was publicly condemned by Muslim IDPs to counter these suspicions. Food and NFIs provided by host communities; monitoring and co-ordination by different volunteers. The IDP community was organized by local civil society organizations and consortia, e.g., Lombay Ka Marawi, where community facilitators were trained and livelihood and shelter planning facilitated, so that hosting functions were partially institutionalized in response activities (e.g., Civil Society Fund, 2019).

Iligan ethnographies and studies of local groups show that strangers across faith lines routinely engage in reciprocal lending, sharing household goods, and ad hoc caregiving. This cohabitation is the key to making hospitality a local resource for displaced persons (Yoshizawa, 2022). The volunteerism and institutionalizing of a culture of readiness among many Maranaw and Iligan people facilitated the above practices and led to community-level activities like camp planning exercises and camp coordination and camp management (CCCM) trainings of IDPs and hosts for return and site management (IOM, 2017; Yoshizawa, 2022).

As a host community, Iligan had its hands full with the growing number of IDPs. The siege has lasted for months, while the population surge put continued pressure on basic and social services. The authors of the intervention planning document recognized the need for conflict-mitigation in Iligan. In Iligan City, 95,011 IDPs had arrived in November 2017, increasing the city’s population by more than a quarter of its 2015 level. This surge placed enormous pressures on housing, health, education, and social services (IOM, 2017; UNHCR Protection Cluster, 2018).

Tibanga claimed that the distribution of assistance was usually prioritized in evacuation centres leaving them only with surplus food packs and delays of up to one month in distribution (IOM, 2017; UNHCR Protection Cluster, 2018). Tension on health-related matters also arise. A lot of IDPs in Iligan developed skin rashes. The rashes were reportedly caused by allergens from sardines provided in food packs. Some parents also gave coffee to children as a substitute for milk. (IOM, 2017). Although some carried views that there was “everyday peace”

among Muslim and Christians through mutual help and cooperation, the massive, sudden influx of displaced persons put tremendous pressure on resources.

This called for proactive intervention to prevent the conflict of the IDPs with their host community (DIB, 2019; Yoshizawa, 2022; Yoshizawa & Kusaka, 2020).

Post-Siege Interfaith Dialogue Initiatives.

According to Church and Corpuz (2025), overcoming historical social and structural barriers would help provide a more inclusive society amidst faith and cultural differences. War makes it more difficult for people to work on differences, as differences are aggravated and mistrust is increased. Although there are differences, there is no better healing than sincere collaboration and coexistence as a response to the challenges caused by the war (Eviate et al., 2017). Peace initiatives that involve different religions are useful for promoting peace and solidarity in Mindanao.

During the World Interfaith Harmony Week on February 7, 2019, the Silsilah Forum brought together Muslim and Christian IDPs. It arranged a joint ceremony that involved a prayer for healing and reconciliation. By coming together, these people continued to share their stories about protection and rescue. This reduced the importance of fears and suspicions that host people have. The Marawi World Interfaith Harmony Week brought together women and other local actors that provided platforms for healing and needs articulation symbolically and practically. It also established a community owned narrative of solidarity, which could be institutionalized into long-term reconciliation and recovery efforts (World Interfaith Harmony Week, 2021)

Duyog Marawi conducted a three-day workshop entitled “Young Muslim–Christian Life Encounter” with about 30 students Christians and Muslims. The Catholic social action secretariat of the prelature led this initiative to assist in peacebuilding in the war torn city. The purpose of the dialogue was for participants to “share life and faith experiences” and to “find solid grounds of unity towards peace.” The activity according to Reynaldo Barnido, executive secretary of Duyog Marawi, is to “plant seeds of peace and harmony among Filipinos of different faiths.” This case analysis done during the five month long armed conflict marked as a good step towards interreligious dialogue and harmony among the youth (Saludes, 2018).

World Vision and the Ateneo Development Studies Program organized in October 2023 a ‘Do No Harm’ workshop that gathered 28 faith leaders and peacebuilders, some from Marawi, who experienced trauma during the siege. The primary aim was to familiarize participants with “Do No Harm,” a practical framework for identifying where interventions may exacerbate conflict, and for identifying ways to avoid them. People looked at their daily habits and community routines that keep neighbours close.

The purpose of the workshop was to give faith leaders more tools, as well as more confidence to use their influence to impact peace on the ground rather than just speaking about it (Madriño, 2023).

The accounts of interfaith leaders in Pagadian City also show how personal experiences with conflict and discrimination motivate peacebuilding action. As these leaders more involved in interfaith dialogues and community activities, they grow personally and help their communities become more inclusive and atf uniting. These journeys shows the need to generate understanding, cooperation and respect among one another in everyday life. Interfaith leaders show how their experience helps them be agents of trust and unity, (Ledesma et al., 2025).

These things show that there is a shift from spontaneous protection across faith during the siege to a more deliberate and structured effort towards peacebuilding, to embed interreligious cooperation within everyday practices and institutions.

Contested Role of Social Media after the Marawi Siege.

Social media has become a world-wide tool that even kids are now using due to its accessibility. In recent years, social media has become increasingly important to young people in their social lives as well as their learning

experiences (Crucian, 2025). UNESCO (2015) revealed that more than 70% of youth globally is online, indicating the possibility of using social media as a powerful medium to share and educate people on various issues.

Helping Functions: Coordination, Voice, and Solidarity.

Rapid information diffusion and coordination.

Internal displaced persons use citizens' online pages and group chats to access information on the locations of evacuation sites, security updates, inquiries on the well-being of their relatives, and the distribution schedule of aid quicker than through official communication. These alerts that were mediated digitally were essential for displacement youths and diaspora relatives who communicated mainly through Facebook and Messenger (Latip Yusop, 2024).

Collective action framing and advocacy.

Social media made mobilization cheaper by turning isolated anger into visible group demands. Hashtags like #letmegohome amplified the call of displaced people for their safe return home with dignity. The use of hashtags by IDPs demonstrates a pressure tactic on authorities and humanitarian actors to address delays, injustice and claim housing and compensation. Websites like Twitter or Facebook served as infrastructure for peaceful protest, not only vents.

Interfaith solidarity and everyday peacebuilding.

Social media played a role in promoting interfaith dialogue. Many stories and short documentaries emerged and went viral about Muslims protecting Christians and vice versa. The International Alert's Honor: Stories of Valor in Marawi (2018) provides some examples of this as they were played in the media that readers have consumed. Overall, a narrative of mutual protection was served instead of one of sectarian violence. A lot of youth peacebuilding efforts in Mindanao utilized Facebook to disseminate post-reflections, art pieces, and videos which depict high-quality Muslim–Christian–Lumad relations to make it appear normal and desirable. In this manner, these materials strengthened what Ragandang (2022) calls youth peacebuilding agency.

Humanizing “the other” through cultural content and digital charisma.

According to Qin (2025), a vlog-style cultural content that is grounded in lived experience and emotional authenticity has the potential to humanise stigmatized people. When in Marawi, influencers, micro-creators and local vloggers can show the mundane, the religious, and the interfaith friendships in ways that counter the sensationalized framing of the siege. Gong et al. (2025) further illustrate that social media involvement can create social trust and a sense of responsibility when based on relevant platforms and trusted local messengers. Singer and Jones (2025) show how charismatic personalities can create a sense of “connectedness” through the resharing of user content and the display of authenticity. Likewise, ulama (Muslim intellectuals), Christian pastors, youth activists, or women community leaders in Marawi and Iligan can use Facebook, TikTok, or YouTube to broadcast messages of hope and mercy and common humanity. By featuring actual interfaith cooperation, whether joint relief drives, shared Eid or Christmas celebrations or rebuilding activities such digital charisma can enhance social cohesion and aid recovery.

Undermining Functions: Disinformation, Polarization, and Recruitment.

Misinformation, rumor cascades, and Islamophobia.

The pages initiated by citizens that helped coordination also helped spread unverified claims, like reporting exaggerated crime or linking the Muslim IDPs to militants. According to Akmad and Espacio (2024), many nonMuslims started to associate Islam with extremism due to the news and posts. The social media network further amplified such narratives without proper flagging.

Echo chambers and algorithmic bias.

Because of echo chamber dynamics lowering exposure and increasing homophily, user's interests are narrow. As per Grecu et al. (2025), users that often engage with posts that either criticize the government, demonize IDPs, or romanticize militant resistance are likely to see them more. As time moves on, these dynamics can create information silos in which interfaith solidarity or nuanced accounts become exceptional, while stereotyping and suspicion feels normal. When people do not trust lawmakers, it complicates the work of interfaith organizations.

Extremist propaganda and grievance amplification.

The Philippines-based groups aligned with ISIS found social media to be a low-cost, opportunistic tool, the Asia Foundation–Rappler study (2019) shows. Engagement took place as a reaction to local problems and often mirrored offline kin and peer networks. Facebook has become an important recruiting platform, largely accessed through free data. Recruitment content is often produced in local languages (Maranao, Maguindanaoan, Tausug, Bisaya). Temby (2019) argues that the post Marawi grievances among the IDPs make social media a powerful multiplier of propaganda and grievance narratives used by the (decentralised) militants. Recruitment strategies often moved from the public sphere to the private. Interested parties would be identified through public comments or group inputs and then separately approached through Facebook Messenger and sometimes invited to offline meetings. The evolution of platforms, from public to private channels, allowed recruiters to personalize their messaging and leverage trauma.

Erosion of trust and hardening of boundaries.

After the siege, fear, trauma and online Islamophobic discourse helped create boundaries between 'Muslims' and 'Christians'. Narratives that associate Marawi with ISIS became more intense and circulated through sensationalist posts, memes and commentary.

DISCUSSION

Material Support and the Fragility of Hospitality.

Iligan's response to the Marawi Siege included amazing cross-faith protection and community hospitality, alongside new suspicion and strain on resources. Various Muslim and Christian actors who protected others during the evacuation risked their own lives. This suggests that local norms of honour, reciprocity, and moral obligation were compelling motivations (Claro, 2017; Zaimov, 2017; International Alert, 2018). These accounts make a case against narratives which portray conflict-affected societies as mainly polarized or brittle but, rather, throw up the latent capacities for altruism and "everyday peace" (Yoshizawa, 2022; Yoshizawa & Kusaka, 2020).

The surge in population, over 25% increase in comparison with 2015 was taxing basic services, aid distribution and health systems (IOM, 2017; UNHCR Protection Cluster, 2018). Logistical bottlenecks can create tension even when intergroup goodwill is present. Constraints on evacuation centres, delays in food packs for homebased IDPs, and reported health problems highlight such. All might be welcome' is nowhere close to the full story.

These dynamics imply that everyday peace is conditional from a theoretical viewpoint. When there are a little bit of challenges, helping practices can help people get along with each other. But when the going gets tough, these practices need institutional powers that can share fairly and transparently. When promises are not kept, it can erode trust if a policy or intervention emphasises unity without a practical constraint. Iligan's experience therefore has empirical validity for the integrated framework's prioritization of equitable material support as a foundation for trust.

Conversations Between Faiths as Social and Governance Repair Resource.

After the siege, there were several activities such as Silsilah's prayers of solidarity, Duyog Marawi's youth encounter, and the "Do No Harm" workshop. These show that we are no longer just spontaneously helping each

other. We are now entering the realm of peacebuilding strategies. Efforts were made in these arenas to keep up shared narratives of protection, trauma and fear based suspicion. It is important to include different groups such as the youth, women and faith leaders to increase ownership and make sustainability more likely (Saludes, 2018; Madriñan, 2023; World Interfaith Harmony Week, 2021; Ledesma et al., 2025).

Nonetheless, the productivity of dialogue was constrained when it was not linked to material upgrade or governance reforms. When IDPs faced continuous suffering, the sporadic dialogue could be interpreted as symbolic or impersonal. This supports the framework's claim that dialogue without material grounding could become performative.

The Iligan case highlights that Interfaith dialogue needs to be viewed not just as a cultural or theological resource. The interfaith dialogue can serve as a governance resource. This allows aid systems to be legitimised, and channels to be provided for redress of grievances.

Social Media as Contested Infrastructure of Recovery

Research have shown that social media was a key tool for communication, mobilization, and meaning-making after siege. However, it also aggravated divisions, misinformation, and offered new opportunities for extremist recruitment. Understanding the beliefs, dynamics and conflicts of online involvement can be helped by applying the theories of Information Disorder and Echo Chamber and Digital Collective Action.

On the upside citizen pages, group chats, and hashtags for coordination of relief, security monitoring, and advocacy for IDP rights (#letmegohome). According to Latip Yusoph, intercultural and interfaith content is shared on social media. By being shared on social media, it humanizes groups often portrayed in securitized terms. Especially when produced by local influencer, creative outputs have impact.

On the other side of the coin, however, the same platforms allowed for the rapid spread of misinformation linking Muslim IDPs with crime or militancy. This helped to create Islamophobic environments as well as further erode the already damaged trust relations in society. The use of algorithms and like-mindedness has created echo chambers where grievance-related posts are shared without much dispute. This has enabled extremist groups to use Facebook and Messenger to capitalize on local grievances and recruit youth (Asia Foundation, 2019; Temby, 2019; Akmad & Espacio, 2024; Grecu et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

In spite of spontaneous expressions of cross-faith protection or hospitality in Iligan City 2017 Marawi Siege, one finds the reality in many resource-scarcity and differential access terms. In the evacuation phase, most of the Muslims and Christians helped each other in many types of rescue activities, however, the situation changed with the arrival of more than 95,000 IDPs. Local systems became strained which has affected their good will. Though institutionalized peacebuilding initiatives like healing ceremonies from Silsilah and peace dialogues with youth from Duyog Marawi were structured, they were limited when lacked concrete material changes. The power of social media can be seen both in a united front and a divided front. It provided opportunities for coordination and advocacy for IDP rights but also misrepresented the narrative and Islamophobia and provided various opportunities for recruitment in extremist groups. This study finds that sustainable post-conflict recovery requires integration of the three pillars: '(1) fair provision of material aid provides a basis for trust; (2) inter-faith dialogue integrated into governance structures and aid architecture (package not divided); (3) digital literacy helps the navigate contested spaces'. The Iligan case study shows how recovery cannot happen in isolation. Without resources, hospitality will stumble. A dialogue without materiality becomes performative. When social media use is without literacy, it becomes polarized. In the quest for sustainable peace in multi-religious societies, decision-makers must address humanitarian needs, institutionalized interfaith collaboration and responsible digital use. Only in light of this will temporary coexistence develop into sustainable and inclusive recovery.

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