

Liwanag sa Dilim: The Case of Ronda ng Kababaihan in Their Pursuit for Human Security

Kevin David S. Estigoy

ABSTRACT

This study interrogates the conventional understanding of human security which is top-down, state-centric and gender-blind. When human security is jeopardized by the erratic tendencies of the state and state actors, social structures, and social institutions, people are forced to create notions and actions that directly address their day-to-day dealings and current realities. It is then argued that human security discourses “shift from the state to the individual” (King & Murray, 2001, p. 589). This study zeroed in on elevating the value of human life and dignity; primarily accounting women’s place and role in the human security agenda. This study gleaned from the shared lived experiences of the members of *Ronda ng Kababaihan (RNK)*, a women’s volunteer group in Santa Ana, Pateros that provides community services during the day and community patrols at night. It explored the interplay of their context, vulnerabilities, strategies, and identities as they navigate through crises. Furthermore, this study outlined the nexus of women empowerment and human security in relation to community development.

Keywords: *Human Security, Gendered Human Security, Women Development, Women’s Rights, Human Security from below*

Introduction

The Duterte Administration was marred with violence and human rights abuses with its iron fist governance that used “draconian” or “militaristic” approaches, often victimizing the poor and the marginalized. This is seen not only in his so-called war on drugs but also in how he dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic. This led scholars and activists to describe Duterte’s iron-fisted governance as relying on “securitized” approaches to address crises, invariably leading to waging war against the poor (Atienza, et al., 2020; Philrights, 2019).

Conventional human rights theory posits the state as the primary duty bearer; it has the mandate to provide and care for its people. Every individual, as a rights claimant, has the power to demand what is due to them to have a quality life (United Nations Human Rights, 1993). This is what human security seeks to ensure. It aims to safeguard the vital core of all human lives from critical pervasive threats that promote long-term human fulfillment (Annan, 2000). While the state is duty-bound to provide security to its people, the state may consequently be the source of insecurity for its arbitrary use of power and violence. This very phenomenon is apparent in the shared lived experiences of the members of *Ronda ng Kababaihan* (RNK) in Santa Ana, Pateros. In examining their case, this study explores the interplay of grassroots women empowerment in addressing human security issues, specifically when the state and state actors are the causes of insecurity.

The RNK came to be known for their *pagroronda*, a community-based activity aimed to deter vigilante killings which became rampant at the height of Duterte’s war. Later, RNK’s *pagroronda* served to protect their community from COVID-19. In many ways, RNK’s *pagroronda* is a tacit rejection of Duterte’s militaristic stance on illegal drug-related extrajudicial killings and COVID-19 response.

When state and state actors fail, or worse, renege in their duty to protect their own

people, human security is prejudiced. RNK's actions provide compelling arguments to revisit the notions of human security that are conventionally understood as being top-down, state-centric, and gender-blind. It follows that human security is then being used as a subjective construct based on one's personal valuation of their contextual realities, and perception of threats and opportunities in day-to-day dealings. This study reimagines human security by looking at it "from below" (i.e., community-based actions to address various forms of insecurity), and in highlighting the critical role that women play in it, and how they withstand insecurity.

Intersectionality of Human Security and Gender-based Security

This research examines the intersectionality of bottom-up, community-driven, and gender-based framework of human security as demonstrated by RNK, and provides an alternative analysis of the human security agenda that is contrary to the dominant top-down, state-centric, and gender-blind conceptions of security. It seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the socio-economic and political realities that RNK face in Sitio Pagkakaisa, Santa Ana, Pateros?
2. What types of violence are being experienced by RNK causing insecurity?
3. How does RNK deal with insecurity?
4. How do local notions and practices of human security contribute to community development?

The conventional understanding of human security centers on upholding the principle of state sovereignty (Del Roso, 1995). With its statist inclination, an emerging understanding of human security was pivotal, and critics pointed out the need to shift human security studies away from the state and bring it closer to the individuals, and safeguard the vital core of all

human lives from critical pervasive threats (Alkire, 2001; King & Murray, 2001). However, human security has its share of criticisms on several grounds, both from the actors and its processes. As Paris (2001) emphasized, human security is extraordinarily expansive and vague, covering physical security to psychological well-being, which makes it difficult to operationalize. Human rights activists are concerned that human security may potentially displace the focus from human rights and development into security concerns. For instance, embedding human rights policy in a security discourse rather than strengthening its legal hold; ensuring that every individual has opportunities and choices to fulfill his or her potential (Annan, 2000). While there are materials and resources on human security and its relationship to development, there's still a dearth of understanding on how local notions and actions of individuals and communities contribute to and shape human security—particularly placing women on the human security agenda. Furthermore, Hoogensen (2005) emphasized that by using gender analysis it will expose the inherent weakness of the top-down articulations of the human security concept which is neglecting the bottom. Gender analysis within the human security framework is crucial in understanding how individuals deal with insecurity, violence, and inequality zeroing in on its intersectionality—context, vulnerabilities, strategies and identities. A gender-sensitive human security framework will uncover controversies on gender norms and gender disparities in family roles, community dynamics, education, economic opportunities, health care, safety and security, and political participation. Prioritizing gender in the human security discourses can foster more just, peaceful, and resilient societies.

Methodology

This research gleans from the participatory approaches employed by community development (CD) research. The scholarly intent of CD research is to foster societal change and empowerment. Development practitioners and the like make use of these key practices in the following ways:

- a. Use of a trans-disciplinary approach that cuts across different disciplines and considers the intersectionality of class, gender, and ethnic perspectives as part of the analytical framework.
- b. Research as strategy for capacity building especially among marginalized groups, and anchored on community development practice, knowledge, and skills.
- c. Ensuring scientific rigor to improve research dependability and application.
- d. Theorizing from below and indigenization of concepts.
- e. Accountability of the researcher to the different ‘publics’ (Tungpalan & Bawagan, 2015).

This research utilizes participatory workshops to identify local notions and practices of safety and human security. These workshops include *Puno ng Problema* [Conflict Tree Analysis], *Usapang Pangarap* [Dream Board], *Talalarawan* [Auto-photography], *Kwento Namin* [Our Story], and *Mapa ng Sitio Pagkakaisa* [Community Mapping]. The participatory workshops were designed so that RNK members could reflect on their collective practices and connect it with their daily lives.

Smith and Osborn’s (2008) Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis framework was used for data interpretation and analysis which focused on how participants are making sense of their personal and social world and the meanings they attach to a particular experience, event, or state. There are three key features to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Experience, namely: experience, idiography and interpretation (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Experience means attending to aspects of reality which matter to people and give rise to particular behavior and actions. Idiography focuses on how to make sense of the concrete, the particular and the unique circumstances of a person, and how a person navigates these circumstances. Interpretation has two major components: Development of interpretative layers and the concept of the ‘gem’. Developing interpretative layers employs a double

hermeneutics: hermeneutics of empathy and hermeneutics of suspicion. Navigating between the whole and the various parts is one way of gleaning meanings from the material which can be further examined. The concept of the 'gem' illuminates and enhances interpretation and understanding. Typically, the gem is a 'remark' that has deeper meaning that warrants further examination (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

Conceptual Framework

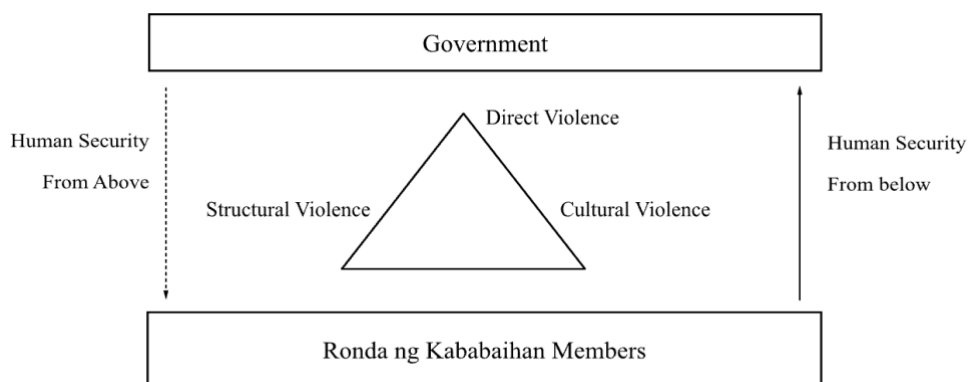
This research interrogates the dominant notion of human security that is primarily top-down, state-centric and gender-blind. Human security was first coined in the 1994 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report. The overall goal was to expand the concept of security, which had been narrowly construed as security of territory against external aggression and protection of national interests through policies. (UNDP, 1994). From this UNDP formulation, human security seeks to shift the referent object of 'security from external threat' to 'security of the people'. It was about ensuring basic human needs in economic, health, food, social, and environmental terms. Furthermore, it provides for the separation of the internal and external security functions of the state, and underpins the roles of the state and state actors in providing human security. Consequently, with this understanding of human security, very important components were overlooked to address contemporary controversies, such as when the state or state actors are the cause of insecurity. As a recourse, this study delves into the lived experiences of RNK as an alternative proof of concept that is bottom-up, community-driven and gender-based, centering on the individual or community's plight towards a gendered human security agenda.

The issue of violence is central to the human security discourse. According to Galtung's (2004) Violence Triangle, cultural violence legitimizes both structural and direct

violence, linking these three types of violence in causal chains with cultural tenements that enable exploitation, repression, oppression, alienation, and other forms of structural violence. These three types of violence (cultural, structural, and direct) build on each other (Galtung, 2004). It provides perspectives in understanding motivations, actions, and impacts of the various state actors and structures involved in a conflict. Galtung (2004) posits that in societies with conflict, it is imperative to uncover specific causes as well as more general conditions that increase the likelihood of violent conflict or insecurity. Galtung (2004) posits that in societies with conflict, it is imperative to uncover specific causes as well as more general conditions that increase the likelihood of violent conflict or insecurity. According to Galtung (2004), these are the pertinent conditions making violent conflict or insecurity more likely: (a) little or no democratic means of dispute resolution; minorities excluded from political representation; (b) wealth, territory or resources shared unequally and controlled by powerful elites; (c) poverty; (d) government is above the law, making arbitrary and illegitimate decisions; (e) judicial system is absent or interfered with, not independent or fair, and (f) human rights are abused.

Figure 1

Bottom-up, community-driven and gender-based human security



Note: Adapted from “Violence, War and Their Impact on Visible and Invisible Effects of Violence, Polygog” by J. Galtung, 2004. Forum für interkulturelle Philosophie 5.

Meanwhile, gender theory provides insights on how societal structures of power, norms and roles contribute to insecurity. Gender theory rooted at the individual level asserts that security poses threats to the empowerment of an individual. It serves as a framework of action through discursive positioning that situates women as central, or as bare minimum, a part of the human security agenda. Hoogensen and Stuvøy (2006), underscored that gender approaches not only provide depth and certainty to a wider human security concept but also warrant theoretical conceptualizations that emanate from the bottom-up. In this sense, a gendered human security framework provides the integration of women and gender perspectives as potent resources to provide stability and lasting human security. When women employ resistance in order to survive, it is a crucial manifestation of human agency in human security.

Nussbaum (2011) formulated a theory of fundamental entitlements as her take on capabilities approach through central capabilities namely: life, bodily health, bodily integrity, senses, imagination and thought, emotions, practical reason, affiliation, other species, play, and control over one's environment. These entitlements impose duties on state and state actors, social structure, and social institutions, who must ensure that all people meet minimal thresholds of those capabilities. For women to exercise agency, they must have security and live without fear of coercion or violence (UNDP, 2005).

This study outlines the alternative notions and actions of individuals in an urban poor community in relation to human security from the bottom level by learning from the shared lived experiences of the members of RNK. It aims to shed light on the following objectives:

1. Describe the different kinds of violence experienced by RNK.
2. Determine how the members of ENK respond to insecurity.
3. Illustrate how local notions and practices of human security contribute to community

development.

Hence, this study revisits the conventional human security and reimagines frameworks from the bottom-up, and particularly understanding human security from the eyes of women, as exemplified by the members of the RNK.

Results and Discussions

Life Before Tokhang

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (2022), Pateros is a lone municipality and the smallest local government unit in Metro Manila, with over 65,227 residents as of 2022. The field site is located in *Sitio Pagkakaisa, Barangay Santa Ana* where many of the residents are mostly migrants from provinces or neighboring cities hoping for a better life. As an informal settler area, the residents have to endure the daily grind just to make ends meet. The current rate of population growth is now outpacing the rate at which cities are able to respond to the need for housing and provide basic necessities. This is the very condition under which informal settlers spread, but also thrive. Living in a dense neighborhood, residents in *Sitio Pagkakaisa* frequently face issues such as lack of electricity connection, prompting residents to resort to the illegal and dangerous tapping of electrical circuits or *jumper* just to have power in their houses. There is also an inadequate supply of water. Residents have to queue to fetch water from available sources such as water pumps and filtration for their daily consumption. In addition, more than half of the residents in *Sitio Pagkakaisa* do not own their lots and houses because of problems with land ownership policies. Gleaning on the narratives of the members of RNK, pseudonyms are used to protect the participants' privacy. Janice, an RNK member, shared, "The one who handles us here is being replaced every so often, that is why we are having difficulty in processing payment for our house and lot. It is a challenge to get proper

documentation.”

Nonetheless, things were relatively normal pre-tokhang in Sitio Pagkakaisa. Children could freely play and roam around. Students go to school, study, and play after. Some even stay up late playing basketball and street games. Construction workers, drivers, laborers, and vendors are among the men and fathers who go to work. Women and mothers go about their usual routine of running the house, attending to their families, work, business, and side hustles. According to Jade, an RNK member, “Before tokhang, I was a dresser in Guadalupe, but because we usually go home late at night, I decided to stop working there when our neighbor got killed,” Mika, another RNK member, added that her daily sales were affected, “Before the tokhang incident, we earned much from selling ice because they buy from our store as late as one o’clock in the morning.”

Ghost Town

I was awake at that time because I was tending to my sick child. We could hear noisy dog barks in the vicinity. I peeped through our window, and I saw tall people wearing helmets aiming their flashlights at the victim’s house until we heard crying and shouting, immediately followed by gunshots. We were terrified because we heard the cry for help from the victims, but we could not offer help because of fear.

Janice, an RNK member, still vividly remembers that grim night when it changed everything for all the residents there.

Unidentified men notoriously killed Rommel and Joseph in front of their families, who were both accused of using illegal drugs. Eight bullets penetrated their bodies, killing them instantly. Petrified family members incessantly mourned and pleaded for help but to no avail. It was only after the shooters had left that neighbors were able to extend help. When they arrived at the crime scene, they saw the victims in cold blood, a gory night having witnessed

blood leaking from their bodies.

“Our neighborhood looked like a ghost town after this incident,” Janice recounted. Sitio Pagkakaisa was filled with terror that even extending sympathies to the victims was a daunting dilemma. Sandy, an RNK member, described the unidentified men as the Bonnet Gang, “A group that mercilessly kills people involved in illegal drugs. They murder people inhumanely.” There were only very few neighbors who went to the wake because of fear of the Bonnet Gang. Children and the elderly were traumatized; as early as seven in the evening there were no more people on the streets. Everyone made sure to always double lock their doors. They were fearful to hear motorcycles roving the area. Fear was sown in every resident, terrified of another killing hereafter.

In the coming months, the killings have become more frequent in Santa Ana, Pateros. Janice narrated that her husband was even a witness to this:

My husband, an ambulance driver, responds when there are victims. He carries the victims of EJK [extrajudicial killing] to the ambulance, but is usually dead on arrival.

When my husband arrives home, he cannot contain the terror that he witnessed.

After that heinous incident, residents in Sitio Pagkakaisa feared the possibility of being the next target of the Bonnet Gang. On the last night of the wake, it was rumored that “drug cleaning” in the area had just begun. Everyone was worried about their loved ones’ safety. It brought havoc to the community. These terrifying moments compelled the mothers and women in the community to protect their families by bearing the brunt and taking up the responsibility as the night watchers of Sitio Pagkakaisa.

One night, as she was grieving, Liezel called her friends to their house hoping to get comfort from them. As they discussed what they witnessed and how they felt about it, they all agreed that they needed to do something to prevent the Bonnet Gang from attacking and killing

again in their neighborhood. Janice shared,

When the two men were interred, terror-filled our place. It was during this time that Liezel, a relative of the victims, decided to form a group to patrol every night. They overcame their fears to put an end to the killings.

Eight brave women leveraged their fears to protect their families by patrolling around their neighborhood which continues until today. They call themselves Ronda ng Kababaihan. These mothers leave their homes in the dead of night, finding shelter and security from each other, courageously placing their lives in danger from pagroronda.

The Bonet Gang killed more than 60 drug suspects in Pateros, eight months into the drug war (Baldwin, 2017). The violence compelled Mayor Ike Ponce III to denounce the Gang and condemn the extrajudicial killings, putting up banners plastered around town declaring that extrajudicial violence “is not the right process to stop the proliferation of illegal drugs, we value human life and adhere to the rule of law” (Baldwin, 2017, para. 3). He was the only local executive to oppose the administration’s hallmark policy openly at that time.

Light Amidst Darkness

For the past five years, RNK has established a night patrol routine that begins when the clock hits six in the evening. After her day of work as a Barangay staff, Janice, the President of RNK, goes house to house to remind the members of their pagroronda and sends a message to their Facebook group chat. She also notifies their contact in the local Philippine National Police (PNP) to alert them of their patrol route; at times the local police accompany the group. This instance fortifies the analysis that the community and the law enforcement are intertwined, except that RNK members navigate across the space towards their own objectives, whether to oppose or collaborate with the state and state actors, social structures and social institutions. This reading draws upon a broader understanding of the state and

society as disaggregated rather than monolithic.

They start patrolling around 10:30 in the evening. Armed with only flashlights, they check every block and alley. On their night patrols, they respond to neighbor disputes, drunk people in the streets, disruptive neighbors, troublemakers, youth gang wars, emergency patients, and even sibling and marital conflicts wherein they act as mediators. These findings show that they see emergencies and communal conflicts not only from the point of view of peace and order enforced through discipline, but also on rebuilding neighbor relations and transforming relationships through mediations and counseling sessions. However, in cases that are difficult to handle, they work closely with the local law enforcement for carceral approaches. Janice shared the fulfillment she felt with what they had achieved,

As a result of our night patrolling, people's trust in our community was restored, from the previous ghost town. The local police continue to believe in and support what we do, which is why they decided to include us in patrolling different Barangays in Santa Ana for further law enforcement. Together with the local police, we apprehend minors and drunkards on the street. Even though we are women, we are not afraid of the Bonet Gang, we will continue to strive.

Offenses, Sanctions, and Penalties

During this study, an RNK member was apprehended for street gambling. The arrested RNK member only sat and played cards because the original player had to do something, and she wanted her to keep playing her cards because there was a good chance of winning. RNK pleaded with the local police and tried to leverage their connection with the authorities, or what is called *arborin sa mga pulis*, to help them get their member out of the cell. However, the local police stood firm and asked for PHP 10,000 as bail money for the five people they've arrested, including the RNK member. RNK solicited money to raise PHP 10,000, and after

two weeks, they were able to post bail for the release of the five people arrested. This incident shows the glaring concern of law enforcement, that people will have to thread the needle to avoid encounters with the law, and this translates to the tensions between resistance and resilience in the community.

From the stories gathered, seemingly there are no sharply defined policies concerning the peace and order in their area. Residents are well aware that there are drug users and peddlers in their neighborhood. They do know some groups who freely peddle drugs to regular customers within the community, although many of those involved are outsiders. Additionally, residents participate in the illegal drug trade for daily survival. There are apparent tensions and contradictions in the policies, regulations, and implementation associated with the use and trade of illegal drugs not only in their local community, but by and large in the country. This stems from the militaristic approach of the Duterte administration that uses brute force. However, a more conscientious approach can be operationalized that focuses on the restoration, rehabilitation, and reintegration of the person.

Different Faces of Violence

Residents in Sitio Pagkakaisa are no stranger to community violence. According to Janice, “Drinking sprees that go unabated until wee hours of the night...are our problems here. Theft is also a common problem; even small items such as clothes hanging to dry are targets for thieves.” It has formed part of the direct violence residents have to deal with in their community.

Structural violence such as access to and shortage of water and electric supply, and land ownership are also pressing issues in the community. According to Mika,

Two parties are claiming ownership of the same piece of property. This has been a problem for a long time because no one knows who the rightful owner of the property

is. Just like in our case with Ate Janice, we can be displaced at any time.

Due to lack of clarity regarding legal property ownership, some RNK members are at risk of having their houses demolished. Mika expressed her disappointment,

We are constantly anxious that our house will be demolished because someone claims ownership of the lot on which our house is built. Although we have been here for a long time, we may be evicted at any time because another person claims ownership of the property.

Furthermore, direct, structural, and cultural violence were aggregated and even worsened from the unexpected onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Lack of job opportunities remain prominent in Pateros, which results in cyclical poverty, with the majority of residents living on the edge to provide for their families.

A key finding of this study is a more serious domestic problem recurring within households. Janice narrated her frightening experience with her husband, “Actually, I have experienced domestic abuse from my husband. When we fight, he abuses me physically.” Janice shared that as a leader, she feels very bothered:

I am a respected leader here, and even our City Mayor knows me well, but still, my husband disrespects and abuses me...Even my daughter got raped by my husband.

This is the painful truth about myself that even RNK members are not aware of.

Janice's statement is very telling of the realities of some households in Santa Ana, Pateros. This portrays the struggle of cognitive dissonance and compartmentalization suffered by a woman as a coping mechanism, wherein she incessantly distills conflicting thoughts or emotions into distinct parts of her consciousness. This allows her to function effectively in one area of her life while remaining passive in another. In the Philippines, women may feel empowered in public spheres while being conditioned to accept subservient roles in private,

particularly being in a patriarchal society.

Violence Causing Insecurity

Esther believes that poverty is the primary culprit of insecurity. She pointed out that, “If a person is not impoverished, they will not resort to wrongdoing; poverty is always the root cause of wrongdoing.” This relates to another concern on why violence becomes prevalent. As Sandy puts it,

The root cause, in my opinion, is bad governance which occurs when laws are not followed from the President down to the lowest level of governance; also, where discipline is always lacking among the residents. This leads to a slew of malpractices and corruption, which is already systemic in the bureaucracy. This is also what is lacking in Pateros, a small town that should have been a city by now but was hindered due to poor governance and disunity among elected officials. This has been the situation since we moved in the 1990s and it still prevails.

Wendy, on the other hand, has a different take on it. She shared that it is because of *walang pagkakaisa* [no unity] and *pagiging tamad* [being lazy] among the residents that usually lead to fighting, disturbances, and violence. Mika said,

Being lazy is always a personal choice, and it is the root cause of poverty. Because of indolence and unwillingness to put in effort to work, he would rather look for easy money, such as peddling illegal drugs to get by. Even a lack of personal discipline causes other problems.

These findings both challenge and affirm conceptions of security of state, state actors, social structures, and social institutions. RNK members have different portrayals of realities in their community that may stem from their various circumstances, experiences, and perspectives. Furthermore, the socio-economic-political-gender statuses of these individuals are varying

depictions that illustrate how diverse experiences shape different realities within a community. Recognizing and understanding these nuances are crucial for fostering empathy, empowerment, inclusivity, and security.

As They see it

RNK continues to fight for a better future for their families and their community. For them, this is how they see a life that is secured: in the form of their dreams and aspirations for their families, their group, and their community. Janice hopes this for her family:

My dream for my family is quite simple, I just want for my children to finish their schooling because, as a mother, I only finished high school, that's why I want my children to finish so they can provide a better life for their future families, not unlike what we experience now.

Mika has a dream that is more practical. She wants to have her own house to live in.

I want to have my own house and lot, with electricity and running water. It's difficult if you don't have electricity and running water, better to have these basic needs. Like what we experience now, we don't have electricity and running water. We fetch water and charge cell phones from my stepfather's house. And for our lot, like what I said there is no guarantee that we will stay here for long. Of course, if we have our place here, we will continue to serve.

On the other hand, Sandy hopes for the group to continue loving each other, "For our group, I want to have love and harmony, and to be courageous in all the challenges that we will face. And additional strength for our bodies even though we are getting older." Furthermore, Janice shared, "I hope that our group will continue to strive and remain united, believing in one another." Diva, another RNK member, hopes for better living conditions for women,

In our community, I hope that women will be given livelihood opportunities, and that we will be able to purchase a sewing machine to make rags. Even with low income, at least we can bring home some money. As volunteers, we are not paid. I hope that we will be able to have a stable livelihood here, no matter how small, and that we will be very happy.

Sandy hopes for something systemic—a change in governance.

I want to see a change in the system for the rich and the poor in Sitio Pagkakaisa, and I want equality for all. And for the government to listen to and address the needs and concerns of the poor. Not simply empty promises. That mentality is wrong, it should be changed.

Mika aptly puts it,

Who doesn't want their community to be peaceful, so they can sleep at night at peace without worrying about someone stealing your bike? You don't have to worry about someone being raped in the street. There is peace and no chaos.

For Human Security, for Development

Janice shared her reasons for joining RNK,

I want to help stop the killings in our community caused by EJK, also known as the Bonet Gang which is notorious for killing helpless people. I want to do this for the sake of my family and my community's safety.

Mika has the same reasons, "I joined Ronda because I support their mission. Not only should people who use or sell drugs be arrested, but so should people who engage in illegal activities such as stealing, gambling, street fights, street drinking, and so on." On an individual level, there are members of RNK that affirm the dominant top-down approach to security through

"order", "law", "discipline", penal, and carceral approaches. These varying perceptions of safety stem from people's fear of the potential chaos and unpredictability that can come with a lack of state control. For them, a sense of order and discipline provide security and predictability in their daily lives. Penal approaches are often seen as mechanisms to enforce social norms and protect societal values. People are often socialized to respect authority and follow rules. This conditioning can lead to a natural acceptance of top-down narratives on law and order, where the principle of the rule of law is the central basis of a just and fair society. Furthermore, compliance with laws is often equated with moral and civic duty. Hobbes (1651) underscored that people subscribe to the idea of a social contract, where they waive certain freedoms in exchange for the security provided by the state. On the contrary, carceral means can be manipulative tools for maintaining existing social hierarchies and power structures as they can control and silence marginalized groups and prevent uprising and resistance to the status quo.

The RNK members' reasons for joining include two types of security: security for their families, and security provided by the RNK system. Janice was among the first to assist in forming RNK, and as president of the group, Janice describes her experience patrolling with the group as a memorable journey to help keep the community safe, either through community service and night patrols where she finds herself developing her leadership skills. Meanwhile, Rea enjoys the community service component of RNK, she shared, "The reason why I joined Ronda ng Kababaihan is that I want to help my community through night patrols and community service, and I want to be a volunteer." Mika joined the group out of her interest in the group's advocacy of safety for all, and no violence in Sitio Pagkakaisa. Her experiences have enhanced her personal and social skills. Mika shared, "For me, I benefited from joining the group, I gained confidence in facing people and I gained respect because of what we do in Ronda in ensuring peace and order in our community." She quipped "Ronda ng Kababaihan

serves as my second family.” Wendy said, “I was persuaded to join because I saw what they are doing and the impact it was creating in our community, such as ensuring peace and order, reducing crime, thieves, bystanders at night, and gamblers.” She describes her involvement as a chance for her to hone her social skills, make new friends, and learn more about her rights.

Three themes emerged when asked about their gains in joining RNK: personal development, social security, and women’s rights awareness. Personal development was identified as a common theme, based on participants’ perceived behavioral changes such as social skills, leadership abilities, and a stronger sense of self. Social security was derived from stories where the participants felt a stronger, more intimate bond with their fellow RNK members, often described as *nakahanap ng dagdag na pamilya* [found an additional family]. The theme that resonated the most was awareness of women’s rights—newly gained knowledge of women’s rights and their place in their community.

Summary

This study explores how the gender-based and community-driven approaches intersect with security from below and/or human security. It questions the prevailing idea of security, characterized as top-down, state-centric and gender-blind, and provides an alternative, gleaned from RNK members’ shared lived experiences, which offers an examination of security agenda that is bottom-up, community-driven, and gender-based.

The RNK members initiated the community services and patrolling to fulfill their domestic responsibilities as mothers and maternal figures, as well as civic duties as guardians of the community. In response to the various forms of direct, structural, cultural, and gender-based violence that they face every day, RNK members have developed local notions and actions as contextualized forms of human security. Before the conception of RNK, members were fulfilling their reproductive roles for their children, such as parenting and nurturing, as

well as productive roles for their families and future, such as household management and livelihood; but these eventually expanded to maintaining peace and order and social responsibilities. Their strong desire to protect their community serves as their rallying point primarily for the sake of family and systematic community security. They have organized themselves in the hope of shielding their own families from injustices and violence persistent in Sitio Pagkakaisa. Their stories suggest that they felt it was their duty to protect their community as they would protect their families—with a caring and motherly approach.

In most cases, cultural expectations and gendered roles surrounding Filipino women often hold them back from developing and progressing, but for RNK members, these volunteer women have been honing their inherent strength and capabilities to integrate their maternal strength and capacities into the ungendered role of protecting their community. Thus, there is an apparent correlation between their community engagements and Filipino domestic capabilities that could potentially enhance and expand maternal capacities. Another example is the creation of community pantries during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns in Metro Manila as an emergency solution to starvation. It benefits the people in the community during the prolonged lockdown during the pandemic (Canceran, 2002). Also, in the civilian ceasefire in Mindanao, it is noted that women are key actors in safeguarding peace in their communities because of their inherent strengths in civilian monitoring. Since they have a tendency to listen more and listen better, stronger trust and relationships are built up. Women have taken the lead in calling for peace zones and have leadership roles in many of the important peacebuilding organizations in the Philippines (Julian et al., 2023).

Regular night patrolling serves as the main initiative of the RNK, but they were able to expand their activities to address other community concerns and problems. This has paved the way for the formation of their local notions and actions of human security in addressing direct, structural, and cultural forms of violence and insecurity in Sitio Pagkakaisa, Pateros.

The actual involvement and participation of each member, as well as seeing the positive results of their collective resolve and efforts, inspire them to excel as women and to empower other women in their community as well. Since women are considered a minority group as they do not share the same rights, privileges, and opportunities as men, it is noteworthy how a relatively small women's group in an even smaller municipality in the National Capital Region can withstand various forms of insecurity and violence, thus setting precedents for future women of Pateros.

In addition, the members of RNK's motherly approach to civilian policing ironically complements more vigorous activities such as night-watch patrolling and pursuing law-breakers, especially because most acts of direct violence seen in Pateros were committed by men, such as street fights, gambling and neighborhood disruption, and domestic abuse. While activities with a higher risk of physical harm are considered masculine and male-centered, it is worth noting that these women are always up to the task, regardless of societal standards.

One of the key highlights of this study is RNK members' re-imagination of how human security can be achieved not only at the individual level, but also extends to the community and societal level. In fact, their community recognizes RNK's success, and their local government fully supports their initiative of vigilant and motherly patrolling. This can propel the gradually growing movement of women empowerment among RNK members and the Pateros women.

Analysis

This study explores the interplay of context, issues, identities and strategies of RNK in their pursuit for human security. The bottom-up, community-driven, and gender-based framework allowed deeper consideration of the dynamics behind demands, identities, and

strategic choices in an urban poor community in Metro Manila; determining prevailing parameters for which issues, threats, resources, and alliances are most germane.

The conventional security paradigm fixates on the security of the state rather than individual security; whereas emerging human security paradigms challenge not only the scope of security but also its referent (Annan, 2000; Bajpai, 2000; Sen, 2000). Thus, this study attempts to redress such bias by shifting the value of human life and dignity as referent of security. A gendered human security framework focuses on security on the individual level, interrogating the constraints of solely state-centric human security perspectives, and also analyzing human security at the non-state levels—primarily in localities, communities and households. Furthermore, it elevates the discourse to expose nuances of the day-to-day insecurity faced by women who make ends meet—in the areas of health care, food, shelter, clothing, employment, finances, and peace and order.

Breakdown of State and State Actors

Human security from below asserts that peace and security cannot be realized by imposition from the top, through the law. Research findings reveal that one of the reasons for insecurity in Sitio Pakakaisa, Pateros is the local government's inadequacy to address the basic needs of their community. This inaction is apparent with their land ownership issues as there are no clear guidelines on how to process the titling of their lots and to pay arrears to concerned authorities. The existing faulty regulations cause fear among residents of being evicted from their homes at any time. On top of the residents' woes are recurring problems with electricity connection, inadequate water supply, lack of livelihood opportunities, and peace and order. These findings show that the primacy of the interests of the state and state actors (national elites) enforced through laws over the needs of the people prejudices the community (human

security).

RNK have different portrayals of their realities as they have experienced and lived with it. They vary in terms of their notions whether to cope with or against the state and state actors, social structures, and social institutions. As presented in the findings, their perceptions of safety stem from their fear of unpredictability that may come without state control. For them, a sense of order and discipline provide a sense of certainty and security in their day-to-day dealings.

On the other hand, findings also reveal that RNK members recognize that adherence to the rule of law is in accordance with moral and civic duty. Their efforts to forge partnerships with the local enforcement is an attempt to cover more ground in maintaining community peace, and order and security. With these research findings, it solidifies the premise of this research in search for supporting local notions and initiatives emanating from security from below as an alternative—one that is bottom-up, community-driven, and gender-based.

Maneuvering Through State and Space

From the accounts and stories of RNK members, their understanding of human security evolves through time. The initial goal of RNK is to protect the community from subsequent killings by the Bonet Gang. Interestingly, as their understanding of human security grew, so did the scope of their concerns and needs. Recognizing that hunger, lack of livelihood, and wife beating are all human security issues, their response evolves accordingly. Every aspect has a historical, cultural, political, economic, religious, and social context. Kent (2006) proves this by arguing that security concepts are culturally embedded. The changing socio-economic and political landscape of a community consequently influences the issues and needs, values systems, plans, and actions.

RNK members see the tokhang incident as a complex thing. Even though the state is seen as an alleged perpetrator, there are many factors contributing to this notorious act. These may be police violations of human rights, but there are other factors to consider as well, such as a flawed justice system, culture of impunity, and apathy to name a few. This also applies to other types of violence that cause insecurity. In order to have a better grasp of the security situation, it is imperative to investigate the different facets of how a community operates, or even how society works. It requires a more critical approach to identify the actual conditions of the people, and the society where they live. Human security goes with its context, it is fluid—it expands and contracts in response to the social milieu where people are situated.

Should residents of Sitio Pagkakaisa have more life options and opportunities, their perception of life and human security would take a new form. If better options for taking action are made available, the community's notion and practice of human security would change accordingly. Colak and Pearce (2009) aptly state that human security is based on the community's shared values, which are central to the successful functioning of security capabilities.

Latent Cost of Localized Human Security

The inaction of the state causes a heavy toll on the lives of people. It places unnecessary burdens, particularly on vulnerable sectors such as women in urban poor communities. Janice shared her struggles with her husband, who asked her to choose between RNK or her family. She is being unjustly cornered. There is a cost to operationalizing community actions in addressing human insecurity. When the RNK members do their regular night patrols, community service, and other activities, they incur an opportunity cost (i.e. time, potential income, company) that should have been devoted to their families and loved ones.

Human Security From the 'Eyes of Women'

Galtung's (2004) Violence Triangle provided the different dimensions of violence. In Sitio Pagkakaisa, manifestations of direct violence were death, theft, coercion, disputes, and inflicting fear. On the other hand, structural violence is not simply neglect by the state, rather it is the violence brought about by social structures and social institutions not only by state or state actors. These are community issues and concerns related to shortage of electricity and water supply, land and house disputes, and peace and order. Moreover, cultural violence manifests in the dynamics of patriarchy in the community. Majority of residents in Sitio Pagkakaisa still understand women as homemakers, as subordinated to men, violence against them is private, as reserve labor force, and as sexual objects. Some women are either marginalized, discriminated against, or even exploited by the harsh realities of a patriarchal society.

Employing Galtung's (2004) Violence Triangle, violence rooted from patriarchy is considered part of cultural violence; and seemingly this already covers gendered violence. In feminist theory, there is no dichotomy in patriarchy; it manifests both in public and private spaces. However, gendered violence must be distinctly recognized in Galtung's (2004) Violence Triangle due to its complexity; it involves unique forms, dynamics, and implications that intersect with direct, structural, and cultural violence. This distinction is crucial for understanding the full scope of the problem and for developing comprehensive strategies to address and prevent gendered violence effectively.

Figure 2

Human Security from the eyes of Ronda ng Kababaihan

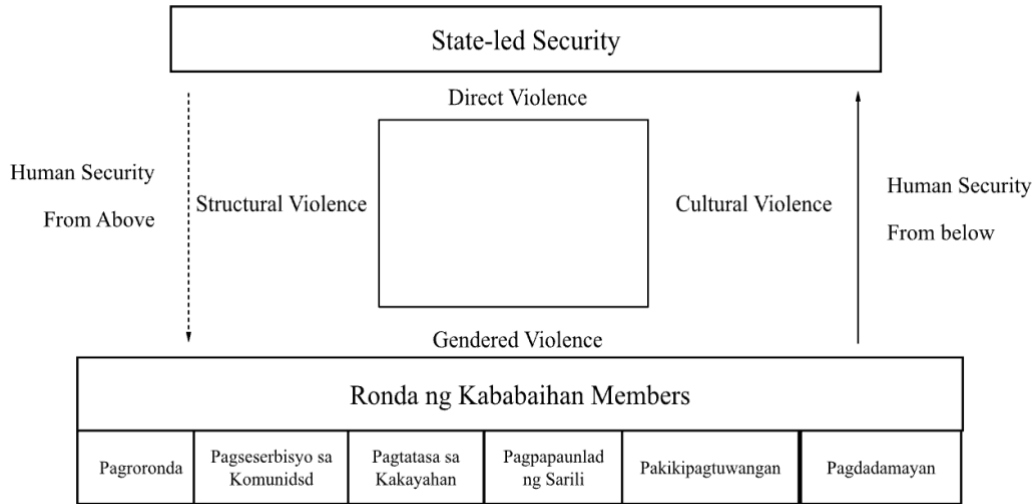


Figure 2 provides an approach to human security that is concerned with linkages between various forms of insecurity and gender-based violence among various levels of violence, from state and non-state actors to interpersonal violence at a local and household level.

Using gender theory grounds the analysis on how entrenched societal structures and dynamics of power, norms, and roles contribute to insecurity. It places women at the forefront of the human security agenda, who are often left out in the discourses. A key finding of this study is the recognition of another dimension of violence, which is gendered, provided that Galtung’s (2004) concept of cultural violence has overlooked gendered violence at the personal or family level. From the shared lived experiences and stories gathered, there are RNK members who have been abused in their homes by their spouses or partners. There have been instances of men inflicting physical, verbal, or emotional harm on wives and women, but these incidents are often kept secret. Employing a gendered human security paradigm

exposes women's realities and contexts that are often overlooked and taken for granted.

Amidst the recurrence of various forms of violence in Sitio Pagkakaisa, it has paved the way for RNK to take matters into their own hands in the form of resistance and resilience. RNK challenges power structures and norms, often subtle, in their day-to-day survival. RNK has developed six localized notions, practices and initiatives that build on human security: *pagroronda*; *pagseserbisyo sa komunidad* [serving the community], *pagpapaunlad ng kasanayan* [skills development]; *pagpapaunlad ng sarili* [developing oneself]; *pakikipagtuwangan* [sharing of burden]; and *pagdadamay* [commiseration]. All these are manifestations not only of human security from below, but also human security from the eyes of women, tapping into their human agency—motherly care, purpose, and grit in order to not just survive but thrive. Their resistance and resilience are manifestations that capacitating human agency is crucial in fostering lasting human security in a community. These compelling findings validate the research premise of an appalling need for a more nuanced understanding of human security that is bottom-up, community-driven, and gender-based.

The bottom-up, community-driven, and gender-based human security framework has fostered a more grounded sensing of their contextual realities based on risks, threats, resources, assets, demands, identities, and strategic choices. Factoring all these ambiguities and nuances of the people, particularly women in the community, is key in the pursuit for a more humanized security agenda. The creation of RNK's local notions and actions of contextualized human security not only challenges peace and order, patriarchy, and insecurity in their community, but also incorporates their experiences, capacities and prowess as foundation for advancing human agency through women empowerment and community development.

Resistance and Resilience

The plight of Filipino women have always been intimately linked with the broad, complex and deeply entrenched struggles for social justice and sovereignty. All throughout Philippine history, it offers a bewildering panoply of forms and outcomes of social resistance contra the state. The result is a spectrum of contained and transgressive, broad-based and narrowly waged, permitted and suppressed, and successful and failed uprisings. In properly elevating women in the security agenda there is a need to develop a typology of resistance and resilience. This probing in turn permits consideration of depth and breadth of socio-economic-political dimensions, of framing and brokerage, of co-optation and contestation, and collaboration and opposition.

Gleaning from the lived experiences of RNK members, their local notions, and practices of reinforcing human security can be attributed to their increased social capital. Putnam (1995) underscored that social capital is regarded as the glue that keeps society together. It necessitates the development and implementation of strategies that support social networks, build trust among members, foster respect within the community, encourage participation and engagement by people from diverse backgrounds, and develop a shared sense of belonging and future vision (UNDP, 2009). Essentially, social capital is seen as a means of ensuring community security alongside community development. Therefore, they are mutually reinforcing; secured communities are more likely to have a stronger social capital and as a result, can build stronger and developed communities. The shared lived experiences of RNK members offer an alternative outlook for human security—human security from the bottom-up, community-driven, and gender-based.

For development practitioners, the goal is not simply to broaden the scope of intervention to be more inclusive, but instead to better read the contextual realities, define

gaps, priorities, and opportunities, and work with the inherent strength of the people and the community. The goal is to foster spaces for autonomous and peripheral actions while also improving interfaces between diverse components, processes, actors, and enabling institutions. The people have the right to demand and hold the state, state actors, social structures, and social institutions accountable. Community development practitioners must ensure to hold the line for the people and devise alternative modes of intervention in system strengthening. Unless serious efforts are being made to address the vulnerabilities of the community, human security remains elusive.

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