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Foreword

Human Rights at the Margins

The different academic units of the College of Social Work and Community Development take turns putting together issues of the Philippine Journal of Social Development. The Department of Social Work is responsible for this volume which, incidentally, is the first to be completely delivered online. It chose the theme "Human Rights At The Margins" to focus on the urgency of operationalizing human rights in our daily lives and in the practice of social work and social development, particularly in a socio-political context where duty bearers themselves belittle human rights, some going as far as violating them and creating a culture of impunity.

Human rights define who and what we are as persons, and how we should interact with each other in groups, communities, societies, and other forms of collectivities. Deny them and you deny your humanity; to paraphrase the late human rights activist and statesman Senator Jose W. Diokno. In a workshop on human rights, the facilitator, Ma. Socorro Diokno of the Free Legal Aid Group, and daughter of Sen. Diokno, asked one group of participants what they do everyday. One response was eating. Ms. Diokno then asked another group of participants what human right that represented, i.e., the right to food. The game proceeded with each activity linked to a specific human right. The key message is that human rights are not abstract concepts that have been imposed on us by the West. They are concrete day-to-day activities that make it possible for us to determine whether or not our quality of life befits human beings. Duty bearers, i.e., those in government, are bound by virtue of their position and authority to enable the exercise, protection and fulfillment of human rights by citizens. When they are remiss, Philippine history teaches us that segments of the citizenry muster the courage

to organize and resist human rights violations in various ways and levels, starting from the margins.

These ideas are highlighted in the four articles and two essays featured in this volume of the *Philippine Journal of Social Development*.

The first article in this journal on the weaving human rights in social work is immediately a call for reflection and action (Espenido, in this volume). Social work is uniquely placed in Philippine society as a licensed profession addressing all forms of social issues that result in and perpetuate people's marginalization. In 2014, the International Federation of Social Work, after a global consultative process, put forward this definition of the profession:

> Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.

However, there are many challenges to living up to this definition, not the least of which is challenging the very notion of Social Work as practised itself. Espenido locates the social work profession within the dominant neoliberal capitalist framework, which sees social welfare not as a means to fulfill the human rights of people, but rather as State benevolence, a calculated measure to prevent people from organizing against the ruling class and to maintain the status quo. Conventional social work, for Espenido, acts as a State control over the people couched in the language of charitable service provision. Its primary intervention is to help individuals cope and adapt to the unjust social order that keeps them in perpetual vulnerability to human rights violations.

The reorientation of the social work profession away from the needs or charity approach to one that is affirmative of human rights is crucial, if it is truly to facilitate social change that is geared towards ensuring people' inherent worth and dignity. It will require that the profession and its practitioners reflect on their depoliticized stance guised as "objectivity" and "fairness", and become unapologetically biased for the marginalized.

Ang-Reyes makes a similar case for Social Work with grieving families in the wake of the Philippine government's War on Drugs. The ruthless campaign to purge the country of drug traders and even drug users which began in June 2016 already had a death toll that reached 7,000 in 2018 according to government figures; human rights advocates estimate even more as cases of outside of legitimate police operations and vigilante-style killings were claimed to be underreported, if not ignored altogether in official records. A popular perspective on the killings – and one, which the government has promoted and capitalized on – is that the deaths of drug traders and users were "deserved" and ultimately benefit communities long-plagued with drug-related crimes. Those killed by vigilante groups were literally labeled criminals with cardboards covering or propped against bloody cadavers stating "*Pusher ako. Wag tularan*" [I an a drug pusher. Do not be the same], judged and executed without the benefit of a fair trial as a matter of right.

The number and circumstances of deaths are the most emphasized detail in the assertion that human rights violations characterize Philippine Drug War. Beyond these, though, are also the individuals and families left behind who bear the brunt of society's stigmatization of their loved ones, and even of their grief. The latter in particular is important to note as the social dimension of grief can be easily overlooked in social work interventions dealing with grief, which is generally regarded as a personal and private process.

Ang-Reyes reviewed key international and local literature to understand how grieving is currently understood in the social work context, vis-a-vis the influence of social environments on the recovery individual and families experiencing this. One key features of grief founded on sudden and violent deaths of loved ones is the experience of traumatization and that of having no control over what had happened and is happening at the present. In the context of deaths in the Drug War, this is further aggravated when families are silenced with community stigmatization that their loved ones are criminals and deserved to die. Even when the social worker opts for a therapeutic approach to working with grieving clients, goal setting should be oriented to helping them regain a sense of control over their lives.

Ferrer and Lagos explores human rights and people's sense of community (SOC) in their article on (displaced) people's experiences of living in a resettlement site. As defined in their study, SOC refers to one's feeling of belongingness in a community and confidence that their needs will be met by it. This is influenced by four factors namely, the people's affinity with other community members (membership), their sense of importance of their participation in the community (influence), the feeling that their needs are taken cared of within the community (integration and fulfillment of needs), and the belief that they share a common history and experiences with others (shared emotional connection).

There is limited literature on the links of human rights with the concept of SOC, perhaps owing to the latter being more of a psychological construct than a tangible reality. However, as Ferrer and Lagos point out in their study, SOC has been shown in several researches to influence people's motivations and behaviors with regard to collective action. This holds promise in the discourse of community organizing and development, specifically in building community capacities to assert their human rights in an otherwise disempowering situation of forced resettlement, that is, apart from material and livelihood needs, it is the

social bonds among residents in a geographic space that can form a solid base for people's participation and human rights movement.

Velasco's article also emphasizes people's initiatives to assert their rights, specifically, the workers in export processing zones ("ecozones") demanding for better working conditions through collective action. One distinct character of unionizing within the ecozones is the simultaneously local and globalized nature of their struggle: while workspaces and sources of labor can be geographically localized and specified, the formal and informal policies and practices governing labor conditions, from wages to management, are multi-level and sometimes contradictory. For instance, while the Philippines is party to international human rights conventions and standards relating to decent work, these seem to be largely disregarded in the context of ecozones. Ecozones, as established in the country, are enclaves where industries, often foreign-owned, are not subject to regular Philippine labor policies, on the pretext of attracting more foreign direct investments and, consequently, opening more employment to Filipinos (SEPO 2008). However, projected macroeconomic benefits from ecozones are negated by labor issues that include "low pay, excessive salary deductions, forced overtime, high production quota and lack of incentives" (UN 2004 as cited in SEPO 2008, also in Velasco in this volume).

It is in this context that the limitations of appreciating human rights as simply a matter of legalities is exposed as more often than not, laws or its interpretations are skewed to protect business interests. Instead, what may be more relevant is to enforce human rights principles as embodied in the acronym PANTHER (participation, accountability, non-discrimination, transparency, human dignity, empowerment and rule of law). Related to this, holding companies accountable to their corporate values as publicized also proved to be strategic. In the five case studies presented, Velasco showed how supply chain organizing

could be an effective strategy to engage global clients of transnational factories in an ecozone to pressure the latter to respond to the workers' demands.

Two essays are included in this volume.

The first essay is about the people of Tondo, specifically, the *tambays*, who also became targets of the State's campaign on peace and order, explicitly, and against criminality, implicitly, in 2018. As Papa creatively presents, *tambays* are part of the landscape of Tondo, and as such embody as well the stigma of the place: Tondo as an urban poor community, Tondo as a community of deprived and depraved individuals, and Tondo as a violent community within itself and to outsiders. Yet on closer look, and from the eyes of a mother who is bringing child to her old home, this picture reveals itself as a stereotype: the *tambays* are humans after all, and Tondo is also home. In a non-didactic way, Papa's essay emphasizes the perils of stereotyping and stigmatization on the fulfillment of certain groups' human rights. Stereotyping and stigmatization, in effect, not only cut these people from the mainstream, but also puts them up as scapegoats for not being "like us". If shared humanity is the basis for asserting human rights, to be stereotyped and stigmatized as being less human by virtue of one's appearance, socio-economic class, ethnicity and SOGIE, among others is to be less "deserving" of human rights.

The above point is also essayed in the REDO article of participatory video and the Lumad schools. The Lumads of Mindanao have a long history of struggle against displacement from their ancestral domains by mining and logging companies, and other industries aggressively bringing "development" to their area. They are no longer strangers to being stigmatized as "primitive" people who refuse to let go of their "backward" culture, and also being tagged sa rebels and armed communists. The latter in particular paved the State's

intrusion to their communities by way of militarization. In recent years, the issue of military personnel occupying or bombing Lumad schools have been featured in mainstream media.

The article reads as a reflection of the REDO training team who went in Surigao del Sur in 2017 to build the capabilities of Lumad schoolteachers and communities in using video as a documentation and advocacy tool. Communicating and education through stories is not a new terrain for the Lumads, and as the REDO team noted, what they only brought to the former is a form of technology that can enable them to speak their realities to a wider audience.

This volume of the PJSD also publishes the Unity Statement of human rights defenders forged during the National Conference on "Creating Innovations through Collaborative Action Research and Community Dialogue". The event was held last September 25-26, 2018 at the University of the Philippines, College of Social Work and Community Development. The participants came from various civil society groups, including grassroots-based organizations, faith-based groups, non-government organizations (NGOs) and the academe; many self-identified as human rights defenders.

The Unity Statement is but a glimpse of what human rights and human rights work is at the margins. It is an act of courage as well as of defiance, breaking the public perception that silence is the norm vis-a-vis the killings. Beyond the academic discourse, and still yet to be documented, are the myriad of stories that puts to task claims that human rights are empty words and have no bearing to human life and civil society.

Issue Editors

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