Chutimas Suksai, Raymond Narag, Daraaceh and Keng Menglang. *Whose security counts? Participatory research on armed violence and human security in Southeast Asia.* Bangkok: Small Arms Survey and Nonviolence International, 2003. 55 pp.

SHARON M. QUINSAAT

Whose Security Counts? endeavors to link violence, misuse of small arms and human insecurity in Southeast Asia. It collates the findings of different case studies conducted in Burma/Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand, which are part of a three-year project of Small Arms Survey and different partner institutions in Asia-Pacific. It explores the views, understandings and interpretations of survivors and witnesses of armed violence in different settings. The authors do not feign comprehensiveness of the research-publication and caution that it captures only a narrow breadth of the rich findings of the case studies.

The authors set off the tone of the book with a discussion of human security and its challenges in Southeast Asia. Unlike the different regions in Asia, the concept of human security within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member-countries is constricted by a powerful security sector, stronger than and sometimes more independent of central authority. However, human rather than state-based approach to security is a necessary prerequisite to fully appreciate the relationship between small arms misuse and armed violence. Addressing misuse rather than proliferation is where the line can be drawn between a people-centered perspective vis-à-vis the traditional notion of security.

The book also critiques the predisposition of most studies to characterize the level of violence based on statistical figures of firearm-related deaths and injuries. Quantitative data do not capture the totality of violence, but rather silence the victims' perspective of their situation. It is in this context that participatory research approach, particularly participatory rural appraisal (PRA) was employed for surfacing the answers to the questions: What makes people insecure? How is insecurity understood? What are the local responses to human insecurities? PRA emphasizes local knowledge to enable local people to make their own appraisal, analysis and plans. Local people undertake data collection and analysis, with outsiders facilitating rather than

controlling. Thus, the "subject" becomes the "expert" while the researcher a "listener" (9). A mixture of PRA tools—semi-structured interview, focused group discussion, pair-wise ranking and mapping—was consistently used in all the five case studies, mainly for the purpose of triangulation.

Narag's case study on "Fraternity Violence and Small Arms: Impact on Student Security in Five Manila Universities" is a radical departure from the traditional small arms research in the Philippines, as it unmasks armed violence in metropolitan Manila, a non-conflict-affected area. Narag, a former victim of fraternity violence, attributes aggression among otherwise progressive student organizations to the militarization of Philippine society since the 1970s. The study digresses from the original intention of the research, which is to elicit people's perception of security. Rather, it focuses on the causes of violence, which by and large center on the assertion of masculinity and supremacy. Use of arms is coincidental rather than the norm. This therefore is to a great extent unlike the gang wars in the slum communities of Metro Manila reminiscent of Fernando Mereilles's depiction of armed violence as the interplay of poverty, drugs and guns in *Cidade de Deus*.

Development-induced violence is the theme of Suksai's "State-led Violence in Mae Moon Mun Yeun Village at the Pak Moon Dam" and Menglang's "Rural Livelihoods and Small Arms: Impacts on the Lives of Rural Villagers." The former documents and analyzes the effects of armed violence in relation to resistance of a local community in the province of Ubon Ratchathani to dam construction by the government-owned enterprise Electricity Generation Authority of Thailand (EGAT). In contrast, Menglang's case study focuses on the violent appropriation of forests in the Tumring Commune of Sandan District, Kampong Thom, Cambodia. Logging concessions were granted to corporations, all of which have the Tumring Communal Police as their private armies. Both studies underscore that people's security has been jeopardized mainly by loss of access to natural resources, primarily land. Small arms, in this context, play a role as tools of coercion, intimidation and a range of abusive behavior in seizing common property resources. In addition, the deployment of armed soldiers and policemen affect the communities' capacity to participate in non-violent demonstrations and protests, rendering them vulnerable and compliant. Weapons thus perpetuate power imbalances or asymmetries within the framework of development aggression.

Conflict serves as the backdrop for the last two case studies. "Counter-insurgency and Small Arms: Displacement and Insecurity" (Daraaceh) describes the insecurities of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in encampments within Aceh. Pair-wise ranking was used to draw out human security concerns. IDPs register an overwhelming fear of physical threats such as death, abduction, torture and rape. Furthermore, insecurity varies according to gender and age. For instance, young women reveal that their foremost apprehension is rape, while men are more alarmed of abduction and forced disappearances. Conversely, the last case study, "Survival in the 'Liberated Area': Impact of Small Arms and Light Weapons on Villagers in Karen State" (Suksai), which also deals with IDPs, portrays the experiences of Gho Kay villagers who are ethnically Karen and currently live under the administration of the Karen National Union (KNU). The discussion of insecurity in this case study is very thin. The issue of small arms misuse is somehow being forced to come to fore without establishing the circumstances that induce such. The study devotes a great deal of discussion on the technical aspects of weapons and types of injuries, which in the end seems to be altogether irrelevant. Despite their lapses, these two case studies highlight a very significant, yet oftentimes neglected, outcome of conflict; that is, civilians have become numb and accustomed to armed violence, such that the effects of terror after long periods of exposure have led to abnormal social behavior, erosion of the moral fabric and breakdown of cultural norms.

The synoptic paper encapsulates the emerging and crosscutting themes of human insecurity and small arms misuse. The authors mention four common patterns, which are present in all distinct case studies but may not be generalized to the region as a whole: the predatory nature of security sector actors, the frequently coercive dynamics of development, the forms of resistance taken to counter abusive authority, and the less visible downstream effects of small arms misuse on livelihoods and civil rights (40-41). What is conspicuous in this section, however, is that Narag's case study seems to be misplaced along the way. This in some way makes the book in itself problematic and deficient in its analysis. If the study was able to extract or apply the gender dimension of violence and small arms misuse, then it could contribute to this crucial trend, which incidentally is very apparent in the case studies, yet the book failed to introduce. This section, moreover, overemphasizes small arms misuse, at the same time, downplays the root causes of armed violence. This brings us to the

correlation between arms and violence, which certainly is imperative if the human security framework is expected to be a more advantageous mechanism than the state-centered approach in dealing with these problems in Southeast Asia.

The book ends with "Policy Relevance of Participatory Research in Southeast Asia," which attempts to cull from the common themes solutions that could mitigate the level of violence and human insecurities in Southeast Asia. A repertoire of policies is presented, mainly targeting the accessibility of arms in increasingly militarized environments in the region. Within the purview of the state is security sector reform, particularly on reinforcement of human rights training within the ranks of the police and military. The authors, however, contend that "the reform of the security sector does not necessarily require the development of new approaches, laws and norms" (42). Observance of United Nations (UN) instruments is an achievement in itself. Harmonizing this effort is strengthening their democratic accountability to the civilian population and improving their work conditions to curb endemic corruption in the security sector, the most concrete manifestation of which is illicit arms dealing. Needless to say, these are simply expedient measures if not complemented with efforts to transfigure the attitudes and orientation of the police and military which unfortunately still hinges upon the framework of national security.

However, the authors contend that all these stopgap policies are rendered futile without regional and global initiatives. Cognizant that ASEAN does not offer an enabling environment for arms control, the authors champion an international instrument that would call for stringent human rights conditionality on any transfers of military and police arms and a moratorium of further sales to any area where armed conflict is taking place or where human rights violations is widespread—the Arms Trade Treaty. Undoubtedly, these mechanisms are laudable. However, the recommendations presented by the authors are relatively unexpected as far as the methodology and findings are concerned. The remedies put forward in the book are heavy reliance on international norms and instruments, albeit under the rubric of human security, rather than local responses to armed violence, such as community policing and peace-building. A hodge-podge of policy proposals which governments have the legal mandate to implement—from security sector reform to the Arms Trade Treaty—oddly became the identified panacea taken from the country studies. There seems to be a disjuncture

between the reality on the ground illustrated by the case studies and the favored solution. Instead of adopting a bottom-up perspective to address human insecurities, which is the intention of drawing attention to local experiences through participatory research as clearly indicated at the outset, the authors contradicted themselves and opted for more state-centered solutions.

Perhaps this paradox springs from the book's failure to lay down the various debates on human security at the beginning. It is simply predicated on the assumption that human security "prioritizes freedom from fear and freedom from want as preconditions for development" (8). This all-encompassing definition obviously is akin to human rights and human development. What makes it novel and more desirable than state security is not covered by the introductory chapter. The fact is, human security is a heavily contested concept in terms of its meanings, forms and implications. Many scholars have articulated that its breadth becomes both its strength as well as weakness. With this research-publication's shortcoming, the human insecurities aggregated from the case studies were unable to tighten, refine or debunk existing discourses on the concept.

In sum, the book is bold enough to attempt to dissect and interlink a nebulous concept, human security, with violence and arms misuse. The study is also groundbreaking for introducing and applying an unconventional and still evolving research technique to gauge the level of violence and insecurity from relatively secure universities in Manila to hostile Aceh. The potential of participatory research as a tool in security studies is the main contribution of this research-publication. The data presented in the case studies are useful empirical facts for problematizing human security in Southeast Asia. However, the book though informative is raw. Supplemental reading may be necessary to better understand and substantiate the findings and their analysis.❁

Sharon M. Quinsaat is University Researcher at the Third World Studies Center and a member of the Steering Committee of the Philippine Action Network on Small Arms (PhilANSA).