

# ASEAN and Its People: Regional Internationalism and the Politics of Exclusion

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Post-print deposited in [Curve](#) April 2016

**Original citation:**

Noortmann, M. (2014) 'ASEAN and Its People: Regional Internationalism and the Politics of Exclusion' in Matthias Maass (Ed). Foreign Policies and Diplomacies in Asia: CHANGES IN PRACTICE, CONCEPTS, AND THINKING IN A RISING REGION (pp: 93-108). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. ISBN: 9789089645401

<http://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/distributed/F/bo18041963.html>

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## **5. ASEAN and Its People: Regional Internationalism and the Politics of Exclusion**

Math Noortmann

### **Introduction**

*An ASEAN of the People, by the People and for the People* – the title of the report of the First ASEAN People’s Assembly – voiced a strong constitutional appeal to Southeast Asian’s political elite (Centre for Strategic and International Studies 2001). The idea of a people-oriented turn in the regional integration process in Southeast Asia was building momentum towards the signing of the Charter of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in Singapore in November 2007. Over a period of less than seven years, the term *people* increasingly permeated both diplomatic and scholarly language (Severino 2006; Tan 2007). The idea that ‘ASEAN needs to shed its image of being an elitist organisation comprising exclusively diplomats and government officials’ infiltrated elite circles (Eminent Persons Group 2007). It was even suggested that the Southeast Asian elites understand the need to ‘reach out and engage the ordinary people of ASEAN with the ASEAN project’ in order to prevent a ‘disconnect[ion] between the elite and the people’ in the Southeast Asian integration project (Koh 2006). With the signing of the ASEAN Charter, however, that momentum was defied by Southeast Asian political elites (Koh 2006).

There is little to nothing in ASEAN’s constitutive document which signals that the Southeast Asian elites are soliciting the engagement and cooperation of the Southeast Asian people, neither directly through representation and judicial review, nor indirectly through civil society organizations. It seems that Southeast Asian *regionalism*, and the political and people oriented interests of Southeast Asian’s elites

have been profoundly misread. The activist focus on ASEAN's so-called Track 2 and Track 3 diplomacy ignored the elitist character of these mechanisms (Caballero-Anthony 2005). The political role of non-governmental actors has been profoundly overrated in the Southeast Asian context (Aviel 1999; Aviel 2000: 17). In terms of the people/elite dialectics, critical ASEAN scholarship must not only engage in politically scrutinizing NGOs in Southeast Asia and but also determine which NGOs are serving their own interests and which ones are serving the people's interest (Petras & Veltmeyer 2001). Analysts of regional integration, both in the European and the Southeast Asian context, have always recognized and stressed the intrinsic role of the ruling elites in those processes (Haas 1958a; Moravcsik 1993; Marks 1997; Case 2002; Richmond et al. 2002; Acharya 1999).<sup>1</sup> However, in the attempt to understand and explain integration processes, the people and the elite/people dialectics have been generally ignored. People have been reintroduced as an element of analysis in political and legal science only recently. The reawakening of the multitude has led philosophers and analysts of globalization and regional integration to come to a conclusion that the usual practices of international law and politics are over (Mény 1998; Hardt & Negri 2006). The conclusion, however, that has (as of yet) not been confirmed by the ASEAN experience.

In this article, I will argue that the people are neglected and ignored in both practicing and discoursing on Southeast Asian integration. Mere characterization of regional integration as an elite project does not automatically engage people in the discussion. There exists a doubt that the institutional process of Southeast Asian integration was initiated by elites. Unlike the European case, Southeast Asian elites were not directly compelled to include people in their regional integration schemes and to move beyond the Westphalian politics of internationalism. In the Southeast Asian

context, elites adhered to the traditional scheme of strict intergovernmentalism, which was based on the premise of the exclusion of people. It is suggested in this paper that the politics of excluding/including people have determined and are still determining the development of Southeast Asia's regional integration.

### **Elites, People and Theories of Regional Integration**

#### ***The European Experience: Post-international Regionalism, or Bringing the People***

##### ***In***

The beginning of the institutional practices of regional integration is generally located in European time and space during the post-World War II era. Therefore, the first generation of regional integration theories is almost exclusively shaped by designs and currents of the European institutions. Among the first generation of regional integration theories, neofunctionalism is by far the most influential.

To Ernst Haas, political integration was the following:

[T]he process of attaining [a political community] among nation states ... the process whereby *political* actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and *political* activities towards a new and larger centre, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing national states. (1961; emphasis added)

In that sense, Haas posited integration as a post-international or a proto-supranational legal and political phenomenon in a traditional international arena.

In 'The Challenge of Regionalism', Haas posed a fundamental question about the 'hierarchical level at which social action relation to integration is thought to take place':

Does successful responsiveness, communication and the de-emphasis of divisive issues rest on mass participation in politics or its minimisation? Are numerical small groups of economic, industrial, administrative and military elites the crucial actors or must the analytical focus be put on political parties and their constituencies? (1958a: 445)

Haas's query indicates that he was, by no means, indifferent to different political roles of the mass and the elites. That observation in itself did not constrain neofunctionalists, however, from adopting a qualified, but conclusive international, elitist perspective:

[T]he nature of the elite structure is singled out as being of crucial importance ... [I]t is equally desirable that "international" contacts among elites of similar status and outlook in all the political units be made to flourish ... Whenever a given doctrine associated with integration has been adopted by a politically crucial elite as its own and thus lifted from advocacy initially confined to literary and philosophical circles, integration has acquired a momentum of its own; it "has taken off". (Haas 1958a: 443-4)

Semi-elitist agencies like the European movement did not provide a doctrine useful for the study of the integration process according to Haas. It merely constituted a loose association of all the contingent-wide groups favouring *some kind* of European unity (Haas 1958a). Haas focused on the governing political elites. Specific interest groups like the ones in business and labour sector with the most interest in market integration in the 1950s, were irrelevant to Haas as a *group*. For his understanding of the integration process, it is sufficient 'to single out and define the political elites, ... the leaders of all relevant political groups, ... which in the bureaucratized nature of the European organisations [play] a manipulative role' (Haas 1958b:115).

To the extent that Haas questioned the underlying assumptions of his approach, the neglect of the emancipation of the peoples of Europe was not one of them. Haas thereby disregarded that some of these assumptions were intrinsically linked to some form of non-governmental activity and idealism. Haas, for example, questioned the assumption that 'a definable institutional pattern must mark the outcome of the process of integration' (1976). However, he did not reconsider his opinion in 1958 that the European movement was unable to agree on the *governmental institutions* which had to *mark the outcome of the process of integration* as insignificant (Haas 1958b). By

adopting an elite-centred approach to European integration, neofunctionalism carved itself a successful niche in the more traditional state-oriented understandings of international relations, but at the same time it overlooked or ignored the position of the people as a specific institutional feature of regional integrative processes.

***The ASEAN Model: Regional Internationalism, or Bringing the National Elites Back In***

The ASEAN project, which was launched in the second half of the 1960s, had a number of significant points in common with the EC's project, which had started a decade earlier. Although both were elitist projects, soon after their inceptions, they took off in different directions.

In its first seven years of existence, ASEAN easily qualified itself as a 'club of foreign ministers' (Fifield 1979). The first summit of the heads of government in Bali in 1976 was the result of events that were external to ASEAN, rather than being the result of politics of regional integration. By the end of the 1970s, ASEAN's greatest asset was considered to be its '*spirit of cooperation*': a spirit which was largely found in the rhetoric of security and social, cultural and economic cooperation and which was 'growing, reaching out from the governing elites to the influential groups in business, the professions and the media' (Frost 2008). A study by Monte Hill based on a quantitative assessment of ASEAN's community formation confirmed that '[t]here appears to be no movement whatsoever toward regional community formation among the five ASEAN countries' in that first period of its existence (Hill 1976: 575). Some of the conclusions of that study – such as the fact that elite students, for example, preferred

to study in countries outside the ASEAN region – are probably still valid today (Hill 1976).

Acharya in his excellent *The Quest for Identity* characterizes Southeast Asian regionalism as follows:

[A]n elite-driven process in which human rights and democracy don't figure. Despite its claims to be based on broad historical, cultural and societal ties, the drive for regionalism is to a large extent reflected in the need of the postcolonial elite to ensure regime survival. (2000:140 )

James Cotton takes Acharya's conclusion one step further and states that 'ASEAN was created for the end of keeping particular elites in power' (2002). Both opinions recognize the importance of elites in very much the same way as Haas did in his neofunctional explanation of European regional integration. In opposition to Haas, Acharya and Cotton are more explicit and critical in regards to the motivations of the Southeast Asian elites. There is, however, no indication that the European elites were differently motivated, or that the motivations of the European and Southeast Asian elites had different normative qualities. However, if these elites indeed applied different politics of regionalization and regional institutionalization for power-political purposes, Cotton's critical *elite community* perspective would be more appropriate than a neofunctional perspective. The latter theory's original preoccupation with a defined institutional and supranational outcome disqualifies the approach for an easy adoption to the explanation of the Southeast Asian integration process.

### ***Bringing the People Back In?***

The qualified disqualification of neofunctionalism as an explanatory theory also endorsed other scholars to revitalize or develop new theoretical explanations for Europe's regional integration process in the early days of Comparative Regional

Integration Studies. John Galtung (1968), for example, stressed that integration is an interrelated complexity of values, actors and resource exchange. Moreover, Karl W. Deutsch came to understand the dynamics of integration processes as having basis on 'essential background conditions' such as the involvement of civil society at large (Deutsch et al. 1957: 5). While all of these approaches moved away from the state-centred international relations approaches and created space for allowing non-state actors back, the more critical, neo-Marxist people and elites dialectic were generally ignored.

That ignorance can still be found in contemporary Comparative Regional Integration Studies, particularly in weakly grounded social constructivist approaches to regional integration and regional institutional developments. How seriously constructivism can be misunderstood and uncritically adopted in this respect is made clear by Mely Caballero-Anthony, who argues the following:

Constructivism proved to be a useful framework in explaining the lack or absence of concrete, formal mechanisms in ASEAN since the approach goes beyond the consideration of power and material interest and sensitizes us to the salience of ideational factors, to actors and agents that shape these ideas beyond the state and the intersubjective understanding that take place. (2005:257 )

Southeast Asia's potential transition from a 'sovereignty-bound' form of regionalism (what I call regional internationalism) towards integrative regionalism has been based by observers on such phenomena of 'regionalization without regionalism', 'soft regionalism', and more recently the concept of 'new regionalism' (Acharya 2002b).

The concept of *new regionalism* revolves around a variety of themes, of which the idea of regionalism from below is just one. While this aspect of new regionalism is well recognized, the role and position of people are still ignored. In its typical

constructivist vain, new regionalism acknowledges and describes rather than investigates integration from below. International relations narratives on regional integration and regionalism still subsume the interest of the people under the imagined interests of their national states.

Representation of non-governmental values such as culture, education, social norms, religion, law etc. guarantees that integration becomes a comprehensive process, which encompasses all aspects of society. An integration process, which ultimately aims at one specific form of integration, is likely to fail as it lacks Deutsch's essential background conditions.

Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, people were brought back in the discourses of regional integration. In Europe, the integration process entered a flow acceleration, which triggered increasing popular challenge to such an extent that Yves Mény concluded in 1998 that 'constitutionalism has grown to its limits and ruling elites are in crisis'. He observed processes, which 'reverse the post-war trend characterised by a persistent and still ongoing process of elite domination under the cover of "constitutionalism" and exclude people from the political process, a trend towards "politisisation" characterised by "agencies, authorities, courts and QUANGO"' (Mény 1998). According to Mény, that transformation has not only been supported by 'political, economic and social elites' but also by 'academics' (1998).

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri observe a similar phenomenon at a global level, where the traditional forms of intergovernmental representation had come under popular scrutiny. According to Hardt and Negri (2006), the passage of sovereignty is no longer possible without regard to the multitude. The question as to the relationship between and the different roles of elites and people in integration projects has not only

significant implications for the legal and political theories of regional integration, but also for the politics and institutional designs of global integration (Noortmann 2006).

In the transformation of the complexities of justice in regional and global order formation, it is increasingly important to distinguish between *peoples* and *people*. According to Hardt and Negri, the latter term, *people*, refers to a kind of ‘oneness’ that ‘synthesises or reduces social differences’ because ‘the component parts of the people are indifferent in their unity; they become an identity by negating or setting aside their differences’ (2006). *People* are *plural singularities* with social, religious and political differences within (Hardt & Negri 2006). *People* is an inclusive concept, which accepts those differences within and the different identities of individuals that make up an ever-growing community. On the other hand, *peoples* is an exclusive concept as it divides people along ethnical or racial lines, and it is an useful concept in the maintenance of the international order.

### **Bangkok + 40: What Is in It for the Southeast Asian People?**

#### ***The People in the ASEAN Charter***

‘We, the Peoples’... the resemblance between the opening words of the Charter of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the famous first words of the Charter of the United Nations cannot be missed. The use of the language of old style internationalism could not be more profound. Assuming that drafters of the ASEAN Charter were aware of historical, political and legal contingencies of the term *peoples* and that the term *peoples* was an intentional choice, the opening phrase of the ASEAN Charter pinpoints ASEAN’s predominant problem.

The term *peoples* refers to the concept of nationhood, and through the idea of the nation-state, incorrectly so to states. At the same time, it serves to avoid the use of

the conventional terminology: *heads of state*, *heads of government* or *states*. While the latter language would be more in line with overall international, diplomatic practices, it would also convey that treaty-making is an elite procedure. As stated in the introduction, the text of the ASEAN Charter defies the expectation that Southeast Asia's elites are turning Southeast Asian integration and ASEAN's institutional development into an inclusive process. Since ASEAN came into being, the essential reasons for its existence have changed. The external political and military threat of communism has been set aside by the economic threat of globalization. The new internal security problem, which Bilveer Singh has termed 'the Talibanisation of Southeast Asia' has replaced the notion of *konfrontasi*, which has shaped the thinking of ASEAN's elites (2007). Furthermore, it has been its *raison d'état* for a long time, but which according to many Southeast Asian writers has become unthinkable now. It must be questioned, however, whether these environmental shifts have affected ASEAN's elites to the extent that they feel the necessity of shifting from an *international* unity among the ASEAN nations, towards a *transnational* unity among its people. The latter would definitely require the institutional involvement of traders and entrepreneurs, producers and consumers, and employers and labourers where economic integration is concerned and the involvement of artist and their public, clergyman and believers, teachers and students took cultural, religious and educational integration into consideration.

The text of the ASEAN Charter is far from ambiguous in this respect. Only one of the fifteen purposes of the ASEAN Charter refers to ASEAN's people. According to 1(13), the ASEAN Charter seeks, 'to promote a people-oriented ASEAN in which all sectors of society are encouraged to participate in, and benefit from the process of

ASEAN integration and community building’, except for more general questions concerning the relationship between Article 1(13) and all other objectives listed in Article 1. Indeed, the main question is: What is meant by a ‘people-oriented ASEAN’? Unfortunately, the answer involves a substantial amount of educated guesswork, as the ASEAN Charter does not provide us with an answer. Except for the reference to the ‘promotion of people-to-people interaction’ as one of the tasks of the ASEAN Foundation (Article 15(1)), *people* are omitted from the substantive text of the ASEAN Charter and excluded from the practices and procedures of the organization.

The text of the Charter stands in strident contrast with the idea of the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) that there exists a need:

To cultivate ASEAN as a people-centred organisation and to strengthen the sense of ownership and belonging among its people, including enhancing the participation of and interaction among Parliamentarians in ASEAN Member States (AIPA), representatives’ civil society organisations, the private business sector, human rights groups, academic institutions and other stakeholders in ASEAN. (Singh 2007: 6)

The EPG’s report on the ASEAN Charter furthermore suggested ‘empowering’ the people and ‘involving people in *functional* cooperation activities in ASEAN’ (Singh 2007: 20; emphasis added). The report, however also falls short of indicating the means to achieve those purposes. Rather than setting out mechanisms and procedures for people’s empowerment and involvement, the report adheres to a top-down vision and endorses the idea that all this has to be *promoted* rather than affected.

The perception of ASEAN’s former Secretary-General, Rudolpho Severino (2006), of ASEAN’s problem in Southeast Asia’s search for an ASEAN Community reflects how flawed the conception of Southeast Asia’s regional integration and the role of ASEAN is. ASEAN should be an institutional tool, not an objective. For the past forty years, ASEAN is claimed to have been successful in avoiding war between the

ASEAN member states, but it has definitely not contributed to the creating of a Southeast Asian identity. Since *identity* is the result of *identification*, the people of Southeast Asia will not establish a common identity if they cannot identify themselves with ASEAN as the tangible object of Southeast Asia. And that is precisely the internal challenge that the region and its institutional vehicle is facing and it is there that we find crossroads, dilemmas and challenges. What mechanisms are available for the people of Southeast Asia to identify them with ASEAN as a new transnational political construct?

The concept of *unity out of diversity* – ASEAN's leitmotiv – is not so much 'an elite conceit' as Donald E. Weatherbee claims but a core element of the Southeast Asian elite swindles. 'Unity out of diversity' is the Southeast Asian elite version of the Caesarian adagio *divide et impera* [divide and rule]. The Southeast Asian elites rule because of the myth of an amalgam of historical, religious, ethnic, cultural, political and economic diversities. This is not to say that these diversities are non-existent. On the contrary, Southeast Asia constitutes diversity, like every other region. The question is how this diversity is politically narrated and turned into a mythical truism.

While that idea is an appealing one to those who envisage regional integration as a process from below, it raises the question as to the politics of determining the 'needs of ASEAN's people'. Who determines what people need and how; or through which procedures? That question circumvents the dialectics of normative change. Norm creation is always a dynamic process in which the norm itself is a subject and an object of creation and recreation, adoption and rejection, generalization and particularization, and prescription and application. There is little doubt that the dynamics of norm creation involve such processes as diffusion, framing and grafting. There is equally little contention on the issue of 'norm localisation [as a] reinterpretation and re-presentation

of the outside norm' (Acharya 2004). The problem remains the same: who reinterprets and who re-presents the outside norm? Here, I differ from Acharya's (2004) idea that transnational norms have to be spread through *local agents* as key norm takers. Acharya's (2004) description of these key norm-takers as having 'legitimacy', 'authority' 'credibility' and 'prestige' indicates that we are not talking about people but about self-acclaimed elites. These elites do not necessarily act in the interest of the people and it is not unlikely that norms will or will not be localized according to elite preferences and politics, such as the Westphalian norm of state sovereignty.

Norm diffusion, grafting and framing in a regional context is not simply a matter of taking outside transnational norms in, but also a matter of taking inside, national norms out. This is another form of regional localization and adoption of norms. The idea of the localization of norms in a regional context can only be properly called localization in the dialectics of the global and the local. In terms of the ten ASEAN states, regional norm adaptation is a form of transnationalization rather than localization. Where are ASEAN's people in this process? How can they formally represent their individual, societal or corporate interests? According to Hiro Katsumata and See Seng Tan (2007:1), 'An ideal ASEAN' is 'for people and governments', which is an ASEAN that serves both interests. According to the latter authors, the term *people* refers to a variety of actors 'inside states', and 'the interests of these actors include the promotion of human rights and democracy, safeguarding their communities from the threat of terrorism, the enhancement of their business interest, gender equality and international exchange and friendship' (Katsumata & Tan 2007). Assuming that these, in themselves, laudable objectives reflect the true interests of the people, the question is

not so much as how to promote these interest but how to protect them and how to provide the people with procedures and tools for their protection.

Putting people at the centre is not a matter of mere reference to human rights. There is little value in mere reference to human rights whether it is in the ASEAN Charter's preamble, list of objectives (Article 1(7)) or in its articles (Article 2(i)), or in the intention to 'establish an ASEAN human rights body' (Article 14) or not that warrants the conclusion that we are witnessing a paradigm shift in ASEAN's recognition of its own people. Can we expect that ASEAN human rights body would be granted to adopt a different approach to complaints of individuals and violations of human rights than ASEAN's hailed and criticized principle of consensus?

The presence of a formal body, which could hear and investigate human rights violations and complaints, does not necessarily have to be a judicial institution. Between a full-scale human rights court and no complaint procedure at all, there is a wide range of quasi-judicial, political and administrative complaint procedures that permit individuals to voice their concerns more directly and formally within the intergovernmental organization. The further procedural management and supervision of a complaint is a different problem altogether. Complaint procedures can be arranged along the lines of: (1) the World Bank Inspection Panel, (2) UN Human Rights Council or treaty-based commissions, with their different opting in/out possibilities or (3) the various human rights procedures in other regional organizations (EU, Council of Europe, OAS, OSCE). The ultimate question for ASEAN is whether they are able to fully engage the private sector in the integration process or not. If individuals and organizations are not provided with a formal independent forum to complain about violations of the rights under ASEAN treaties and regulations, these rights and

regulations are virtually non-existent. At most, one could maintain that these then would have a normative political value. In two specific sectors, possible changes are likely to be noticed: the private business sector and the NGO sector.

### *ASEAN's Business Elites*

The earliest schemes for involving business stakeholders in ASEAN date back to the 1981 Basic Agreement on ASEAN Industrial Complementation and 1983 Basic Agreement on ASEAN Industrial Joint Venture. These schemes had 'very limited success', according to Davidson (2002), notwithstanding several improvements and amendments over time. The reasons for the failure of these schemes have never been the subject of in-depth study or policy analysis. However, the top-down, state-initiated project approach, and the intrinsic exclusion of ordinary and spontaneous private sector initiatives must be taken into account as possible reasons for the ineffectiveness of the schemes.

While the need to involve the private sector is officially recognized time and again in a variety of ASEAN agreements and projects, very little has materialized. For example, in Article 6 of the 1992 Framework Agreement on Enhancing Economic Cooperation entitled Private Sector Cooperation, it is stipulated as follows:

Members States recognise the complementarity of trade and investment opportunities, and therefore encourage, among others, cooperation and exchanges among ASEAN private sectors and between ASEAN and non-ASEAN private sectors, and the consideration of appropriate policies aimed at intra-ASEAN and extra-ASEAN investments and other economic activities.

Also, in non-binding declarations such as the 1997 Hanoi Action Plan, which draws an implementation map for the ASEAN Vision 2020, the enhancement of the private sector involvement is envisaged.

Unfortunately, one must conclude that the ASEAN vision does not include more than ‘a study to identify high-impact investment opportunities in key areas under the food, agriculture and forestry sectors in ASEAN and to provide essential information for investment decisions on these opportunities’, and to establish ‘networking and strategic alliances with the private sector to promote investment and joint opportunities in ASEAN’ ( Hanoi Plan of Action 1998).

### *ASEAN’s Non-governmental Elites*

The worldwide proliferation of NGOs in the 1990s reached Southeast Asia at the end of that decade. Since then, the Southeast Asian NGO scene has become more diversified and pluriform (Aviel 1999; Aviel 2000). While there is little doubt that the number of people oriented in grassroots groups and community organizations has increased, so have NGOs with a profound government, donor or business orientation (Reinalda 2001). Southeast Asian NGOs are not exempted from the idea that NGOs are ‘too close for comfort’ (Hulme & Edwards 2013). Moreover, under the ASEAN scheme of NGO accreditation, an elitist community of ASEAN QUANGOs (quasi-NGOs) has been created, which are intended to serve ASEAN rather than the Southeast Asian people. There is little reason, therefore, to exclude Southeast Asia from contemporary critical discourses on the role and position of NGOs (Donini 1995; Petras & Veltmeyer 2001; Noortmann 2003). Especially, because the normative approach to NGOs in Southeast Asia tends to neglect the distinction made above, in that sense, NGOs’ role and positions are misrepresented as representing rather than serving Southeast Asia’s people. Two examples serve to demonstrate the fundamentally flawed perception of ASEAN’s NGO community: (1) the concept of ‘entities associated with ASEAN’, in

particular, ‘accredited civil society organisations’ and (2) the concept of a ‘Track 2 diplomacy’ and, in particular, the setting up of an ASEAN People’s Assembly.

Annex 2 of the ASEAN Charter lists five categories of the so-called ‘entities associated with ASEAN’: (1) parliamentarians, (2) business organizations, (3) think tanks and academic institutions, (4) accredited civil society organisations and (5) other stakeholders in ASEAN (Register of ASEAN-Affiliated CSOs 2009). Whether and to which extent these organizations are truly civil society organization must be questioned. Not only are most of the listed NGOs (semi)industrial organizations or professional organizations; also almost all of these NGOs should be labelled as QUANGOs or GONGOs. Again, the main question is, How can ASEAN facilitate NGOs in their representational function?

JoAnn Aviel’s studies (1999; 2000) on the Southeast Asian NGO community have demonstrated that in the field of human rights and environmental protection, NGOs that are not affiliated to ASEAN have an increasing impact on governmental decision-making in ASEAN.

If Aviel is correct that ‘although NGOs have been on the periphery of ASEAN, the future of ASEAN may depend as much on their activities as on those of ASEAN’s governments and private sector’ (1999:78), the pertinent question to ask, once more, is, How is ASEAN going to secure the possibilities for non-state voices to reach into ASEAN? She holds that ‘networks have been formed which have increased communication between elites and NGOs on these issues [human rights and environment] and have increased functional cooperation’ (Aviel 2000: 29). Unfortunately, here is little in the ASEAN Charter to substantiate that claim.

Based on the status of these NGOs within ASEAN and their specific role, these organizations should be qualified as QUANGOs. NGOs that pursue a proper public interest and serve rather than represent the interest of the people have to face governmental ‘countermovements’ and restrictions in displaying their views, which underlines the differences between elite and non-elite NGOs in Southeast Asia (Aviel 2000). Aviel states as follows:

NGO activity in Southeast Asia continues to grow and is helping to forge links among the people in the region. These links are greatest among the elite, but regional meetings of NGOs and a greater focus on regional issues have helped to increase contacts and regional awareness among more and more people. (1999:89)

Where Aviel refers to Southeast Asia, Caballero-Anthony observes NGO activity in the ASEAN context. She claims that the participation of Track 2 and Track 3 actors in ASEAN processes are contributing to the building of constituency of Southeast ASEAN Community and regionalism. The issue, however, is in the nature of that community which may no longer be anchored on the ASEAN Way, or in its institutional culture that the ASEAN elites had assiduously cultivated throughout the associations history (Caballero-Anthony 2005: 267).

The two positions designate opposite understandings of the position and role of NGOs in regional integration processes. While Aviel believes that ASEAN-NGO relationships may be contentious, Caballero-Anthony insists that the liaison between intergovernmental and non-governmental actors is more harmonious.

Whether, NGOs and the people’s interest that they are supposed to communicate will go hand in hand with ASEAN’s interest is to be questioned. The use of the term *peoples* is likely to be informed by ASEAN’s traditional focus on regional peace and security, which is still the eye-catching first objective of the ASEAN Charter.

Article 1 of the Declaration of Minimum Humanitarian Standards of the ASEAN Charter reads as follows: ‘maintain and enhance peace, security and stability and further strengthen peace oriented values in the region’. ASEAN’s 21<sup>st</sup>-century vision, as laid down in its Charter, however, seems to be more eclectic than that. The Charter’s multiple objectives include diverse aims such as ‘regional resilience’, ‘creating a single market’, ‘sustainable development’, ‘democracy’ and ‘the strengthening of the ASEAN community’. In this respect, there cannot be any doubt that the ASEAN member states seek to transcend the narrow, *konfrontasi*-informed security language that dominated Southeast Asia’s 20<sup>th</sup>-century historical and political experience. In the wording of the ASEAN Charter, it is committed ‘to intensifying *community building* through enhanced regional cooperation and *integration*’. Where *community-building* is the objective, *regional cooperation* and *integration* are the tools, and ASEAN is the institutional vehicle. It is in that spirit, aspiration and ambition that Southeast Asian regionalism and ASEAN as its institutional component must be scrutinized. In particular, the role and position of Southeast Asia’s people in the ASEAN process of regional integration have to be subjected to legal and political analysis, both from the perspective of academic understanding as well as policy development.

The ASEAN Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS) is perhaps the best example of non-people oriented GONGOism in ASEAN. Considering it as an association of NGOs, ASEAN-ISIS states its purpose as to ‘encourage cooperation and coordination of activities among policy-oriented ASEAN scholars and analysts, and to promote policy-oriented studies of, and exchanges of information and viewpoints on various strategic and international issues affecting Southeast Asia's and ASEAN's peace, security and well-being’ (12<sup>th</sup> ASEAN ISIS-IIR Taiwan Dialogue

2010). One of its strategic goals was to obtain ‘recognition from the ASEAN member states as a valuable mechanism for policy-making by institutionalizing the meeting between the Heads of ASEAN-ISIS and the ASEAN Senior Officials [and the establishment of an] international political process – that of “track two” diplomacy’ (12<sup>th</sup> ASEAN ISIS-IIR Taiwan Dialogue 2010).

### **Conclusion**

In 2005, Donald Weatherbee concluded that ASEAN remains part of an elite scheme, which ‘gives institutional expression to an essentially declaratory regionalism that originates ... in the political will of the Southeast Asian policy elites’. Neither the ASEAN Charter nor the recently inaugurated ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) have changed that state of affairs. The intergovernmental configuration of the AICHR does not signal a change in the practices, concepts and thinking of intra-ASEAN regional policies and diplomacies. Civil society scepticism is justified. The Charter and its bodies institutionalize existing intergovernmentalist politics of exclusion. But not all commentators consider contemporary Southeast Asian regional integration and its institutionalization process as elite business as usual.

Whether the elites of the Southeast Asia have the same ambitious and engaging spirit as the founding fathers of the UN or the EU, there remains something to be seen. An analysis of the ASEAN Charter and its institutional context is not the only way of assessing ASEAN’s true integrating aspirations, but also its commitment to the people of Southeast Asia. We, must in the end, conclude that the ASEAN Charter is another expression of the proverbial ‘Asian Way’ or have the Southeast Asian nations transcended that fallacious combination of the Westphalian paradigm and Asian values.

Regional community-building is a vexed and interactive process: interactive in a sense that it is top down and bottom up, push and pull, inclusive and exclusive. Schemes and projects only reach out to the people but are insufficient. People need to connect, to reach in. Integration can be facilitated, but not moulded. There is not any Southeast Asian discourse that does not reach a conclusion short of answering this vital question: How does ASEAN provide the protection for the interest of its people other than assuming that these interests are perfectly protected by the ruling political and governmental-bureaucratic elites?

None of the actors (such as non-governmental organizations and corporations of individual citizens) has as of yet offered an ASEAN means of redress against an infringement of their interests by either ASEAN member states or ASEAN organs. The ASEAN Charter might have provided a momentum for regional and institutional change. That momentum seems lost for now. The reasons for the lost momentum are eloquently formulated by Ellen Frost:

In this new global and regional context, integration and community building should be understood as code words. They symbolise Asian's leaders' search for autonomy, self-reliance, growth, security, and influence without the conditions and rules imposed by a foreign power or global institutions. These leaders look into the integration movement for opportunities to cope more successfully with domestic challenges and thus to strengthen their national sovereignty, not to share it. This search is at the core of Asia's new regionalism. (2008:11)

The ASEAN Way is not only a particular set of regional values and norms; it is also a particular elitist political and diplomatic culture. In differentiating between various forms of regionalism we should not hesitate to distinguish between those forms of regionalism, which seek to transcend the traditional practices and institutions of the international/Westphalian order and those that are not intended to bring about change

(Hurrell 2007). These forms of regionalism must be called *quasi-regionalism* or *regional internationalism*, if anything at all.

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<sup>1</sup> It is submitted here that the traditional arguments against any comparative analysis between Europe and Southeast Asia, because of socio-political, cultural, economic and historical difference between the two regions and henceforth the two regional integration processes, are of a political rather than a analytical nature and cannot be considered to advance the understanding of different political and institutional regional developments. To the extent that regional identities are constructs, regional differences are too. For arguments against comparing Europe and Southeast Asia, see Severino (2006) and Frost (2008).

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